

Derivational Morphemes in Selected Will Woods Songs

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Abstract—This article aims at identifying the types of derivational morphemes that can be found in a selection of songs by Will Wood as well as examining the grammatical and semantic alterations that happen in the derivational process. The data sources include four of Will Woods' most popular songs on Spotify, including *I/Me/Myself*, *Laplace's Angel (Hurt People? Hurt People!)*, *The Main Character*, and *2econd 2ight 2eer (that was fun, goodbye.)*. The research utilizes the qualitative method and the theory of derivational morphemes as stated by O'Grady et al. (2017). The data was collected using the observation and documentation method through the techniques of recording and note-taking. The data was then analyzed using the theory from O'Grady et al. (2017), which states that there are two types of affixes in the derivational process, including suffixes and prefixes. O'Grady et al. (2017) also identifies that grammatical and semantic changes can happen during the derivational process. The results suggest that derivational suffixes occur at a greater frequency and greater variety compared to the prefixes, with only one type of derivational prefix found in the selected songs. Both grammatical and semantic change were also found within the data sources.

Keywords: *affixes, derivational morphemes, morpheme, word formation*

Abstrak—Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tipe-tipe morfem derivasional yang dapat ditemukan dalam pilihan lagu-lagu oleh Will Wood serta memeriksa perubahan gramatikal dan semantik yang terjadi dalam proses derivasional. Sumber data studi ini adalah empat lagu paling terkenal dari Will Wood di Spotify, termasuk di antaranya *I/Me/Myself*, *Laplace's Angel (Hurt People? Hurt People!)*, *The Main Character*, dan *2econd 2ight 2eer (that was fun, goodbye.)*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dan teori morfem derivasional seperti yang dinyatakan oleh O'Grady et al. (2017). Data dikumpulkan melalui metode observasi dan dokumentasi melalui teknik merekam dan mencatat. Data kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teori dari O'Grady et al. (2017) yang menyatakan bahwa ada dua jenis imbuhan dalam proses derivasional, yaitu akhiran dan awalan. O'Grady et al. (2017) juga mengidentifikasi bahwa dapat terjadi perubahan secara gramatikal dan semantik dalam proses derivasional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa akhiran derivasional lebih banyak muncul dengan lebih beragam dibandingkan dengan awalan, dengan awalan hanya ditemukan satu tipe prefix dalam lagu-lagu pilihan. Perubahan secara gramatikal dan semantik juga dapat ditemukan dalam sumber-sumber data.

Kata Kunci: *imbuhan, morfem derivasional, morfem, pembentukan kata*

1. Introduction

Language is an essential tool in the human life. It has long since become the primary device of communication between individuals, acting as a transmitter of ideas, emotions, thoughts, meanings, and messages through the use of certain symbols. The need for language to symbolize these abstract concepts for better communication is one that various cultures across the world has experienced, each language containing their own sets of rules. One of these many languages has even gained great importance on a worldwide scale, that is, the English language that is studied all across the globe. The importance of language in human life contributed to the need to study it in the field of linguistics.

There are many facets of a language that is studied in linguistics, but among them is the study of morphology. Morphology is the study of the grammatical properties of words and how words are related to each other in a language (Fábregas & Scalise, 2025, p. 1). It studies how words as the most basic form of language are formed, that is, through the combination of “the smallest meaningful constituents of words” which are called morphemes (Haspelmath & Sims, 2010, p. 3; Plag, 2018, p. 10)

There are a variety of processes in word formation, but one of them includes the process of derivation. It is considered the most common word formation process to be found in the production of new words (Yule, 2010, p. 133). Derivation combines an affix, whether in the form of prefix or suffix, to another morpheme to form new words (O’Grady et al., 2017, p. 129; Yule, 2010, p. 133). Unlike the process of inflection, derivation alters one or several of the properties associated with an item listed in the lexicon, including its grammatical category, the conceptual semantics it is associated with, and the subcategorization of a base (Fábregas & Scalise, 2025, p. 94).

One of the ways by which humans communicate through language is in the form of art, particularly the expression of ideas and emotions through the lyrics of a song. Many of these derivational morphemes appear in English songs, as the process occurs most frequently compared to other word formation processes. Musicians are able to utilize the incredible diversity of these derivational morphemes in their lyrics. One artist who utilizes such lexical variety in his music is Will Wood, an American musician, singer, and songwriter. His lyrical style mimics that of a monologue, leading to the utilization of a diversity of lexical choices. Spotify, one of the most popular music streaming application worldwide, shows the artist as having an average of over a million monthly listeners on a global scale. Although not considered a massively popular global artist, there is potential in the research of Will Wood’s works for his lyricism and lexical diversity.

There has been previous research conducted on the topic of derivational morphemes in various songs. The first study was written by Yastanti, Lestari, and Rohati (2021) in the article entitled “Derivational and Inflectional Morphemes in Songlyrics of Lewis Capaldi” published in the Indonesian Journal of Language Teaching and Linguistics in September 2021. The article aimed at identifying the derivational and inflectional morphemes present in the song lyrics of Lewis Capaldi’s album, *Divinely Uninspired to a Hellish Extent*. The research utilized the descriptive qualitative method using the theory of derivational and inflectional morphemes as stated by various linguists such as Yule and Aronoff & Fudeman. In the article, there are both derivational and inflectional morphemes found in Lewis Capaldi’s album, with the inflectional morphemes appearing at a greater number than derivational. Both Yastanti, Lestari, and Rohati’s (2021) and the

current research aimed at identifying the derivational morphemes in song lyrics, but the data sources differ, which will yield differences in the findings. Additionally, the current research instead utilizes the theory of derivational morpheme as stated by O'Grady et al. (2017). Regardless, the article contributes to the understanding of types of derivational affixes, derivative word structure, and the alterations that can happen in the derivative process.

The second study was conducted by Kusumawardhani, Sihombing, and Nuraeni (2024) in their article titled "Derivational Morphology on Calum Scott's Song from *Bridges* Album" published in Jurnal Pujangga in December 2024. The article aimed at determining the derivational morphemes that appear in Calum Scott's seven songs in his *Bridge* album. The research uses the qualitative method using the theory of derivational morphemes as stated by various linguists, including Fromkin. The research findings show that there were four derivational prefixes within the album, including *re-*, *pre-*, *sur-*, and *a-*, and various derivational suffixes, including *-ent*, *-ion*, *-full*, *-ing*, *ed*, *-ness*, *-less*, *-ly*, *-ment*, *-ian*, *-er*, *-y*, and *-a*, meaning that derivational suffixes appear more frequently than prefixes. While both Kusumawardhani, Sihombing, and Nuraeni's (2024) and the current research employs the derivational morpheme theory, the current research specifically utilizes the theory as stated by O'Grady et al. (2017). Not only that, the data sources between both research also differ, which will cause differences in the findings. Nevertheless, the article provides valuable insight on the structure of the derivational word formation through the different types of derivational affixes.

Finally, the last study is Amelia et al. (2022)'s article entitled "Analysis of Derivational and Inflectional Morphology of Disney's English Song Lyrics. The article aimed at identifying the

derivational and inflectional processes found in Disney songs. The data sources used were four Disney songs, including *Beauty and the Beast*, *A Whole New World*, *Speechless*, and *Into the Unknown*. The research utilizes the qualitative method and uses the theory of derivational and inflectional morphemes as stated by different linguistic experts, including Fromkin. The research findings suggest that both derivational and inflectional morphemes are present within the data sources. The derivational morphemes include noun-forming suffixes, adjective noun forming, and verb-noun forming, while the inflectional morphemes include *-s* third singular person present tense, *-s* plural, *ed* past tense, *-es* plural, past tense, past participle, *-ing* progressive, and *-er* comparative. Both Amelia et al. (2022)'s and the current research aims at identifying derivational morphemes in the lyrics of songs, but the current research employs a different data source which causes differences in the findings. The current research also focuses on the application of the theory as stated by O'Grady et al. (2017). However, Amelia et al. (2022)'s article is valuable in contributing to the understanding of the types of derivational morphemes and the changes that occur in the derivative process.

The current research aims at identifying the derivational morphemes and the types of changes experienced in the process within a small selection of Will Wood's works. To do this, the research utilizes the theory of derivation as stated by O'Grady et al. (2017). In the theory (O'Grady et al., 2017, pp. 129–132), there are two identified types of affixes that can be found within the derivative process, which are suffixes and prefixes. Examples of the suffixes include: *-able*, *-ing*, *-ive*, *-al*, *-ant*, *-(at)ion*, *-er*, *-ment*, *-dom*, and more. Some examples of the derivative affixes include: *anti-*, *ex-*, *de-*, *dis-*, *mis-*, *re-*, *un-*, and *in-*. The types of changes that can happen during the derivative

process include the change of the grammatical structures from verb to adjective, verb to noun, noun to adjective, adjective to verb, adjective to adverb, adjective to noun. O'Grady et al. (2017) also identifies that there are cases in which the derivative process does not alter the grammatical categorization of the lexical item, but alters the meaning of the base morpheme.

2. Research Method

2.1 Data Source

The primary data sources used within this article is a selection of Will Wood's top four songs according to Spotify, including: *I/Me/Myself*, *Laplace's Angel (Hurt People? Hurt People!)*, *The Main Character*, and *2econd 2ight 2eer (that was fun, goodbye.)*. These data sources were selected as they are considered to be his most popular works, with *I/Me/Myself* having been played over eighty six million times as well as the other three mentioned songs averaging about thirty five million streams since their release. Will Wood's utilization of a monologue style in his lyricism as well as the themes he chooses for his works yield a diversity of lexical choices that are typically not found within the average pop songs. Many of his songs pertain to the struggles of the self, identity, and mental health, including the aspects that are typically considered to be less favorable by the public, such as the complexities of depression, bipolarity intrusive thoughts, and nihilism. These topics are issues that many people similarly experience, very often in silence. Thus, there is importance in the discussion of works that bring such topics, whether to be dissected or for the viewer to feel seen. Aside from the primary data source, the current research also utilizes secondary data sources that were taken from previous studies as well as related literature on the topic of the research.

2.2 Data Collection

This article utilizes the qualitative method, which is described as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, with the data typically presented as non-numerical data, such as text or image, and is more open-ended (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 51). The data was collected through the observation and documentation method. First, the data source was observed by reading through the lyrics of the songs within the album. Certain criteria are used as measurement for the test to be classified as relevant data. The criteria for the data in the current research is any text within the song lyrics that show the derivational process of word formation. Next, the data was recorded in the form of text using the recording technique and note-taking technique.

2.3 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the types of derivational affixes and the types of changes in the derivational process as identified by O'Grady et al. (2017). The analysis is done through Creswell and Creswell's (2018) qualitative descriptive method, that is, through descriptions of the conversations, actions, and thought processes of the characters. The data was then cross-checked multiple times through the triangulation method, defined as [the usage of] multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). After the analysis had been completed, conclusions were drawn to provide a comprehensive discussion of the results. The analysis was then presented through the informal method of descriptive technique, with Sudaryanto (2015) defines as a method of research that incorporates no change of data in the analysis, but rather, done by describing and explaining the data itself.

3. Result and Discussion

This section discusses the use of derivational morphemes found within the data sources. The discussion is divided into three categories, that is, derivational morphemes created from derivational prefixes, derivational suffixes, and both.

Derivational Morphemes through Prefixes

Prefixes are affixes which occur to the left of the base with which they combine (Fábregas & Scalise, 2025, p. 10). Therefore, derivational prefixes refer to the prefixes by which derivational processes can occur. O’Grady et al. (2017) provides several examples of this type of prefixes, including: *anti-*, *ex-*, *de-*, *dis-*, *mis-*, *re-*, *un-*, *in-*, and *un-*. None of these prefixes cause alteration within the grammatical properties of the base word. However, they cause changes in the semantic properties or the meaning of the word.

Out of the four selected songs, only two data are identified in which only a prefix is used within the derivational process.

[Data 1] All identities are equally **invalid** (Wood, 2020b)

Within the song *I/Me/Myself*, there is a usage of the word **invalid**. The word was created through the addition of the prefix *in-* to the base word **valid**. O’Grady states that the prefix *in-* does not cause a change in the grammatical properties of a base word. Similarly, the grammatical class of **valid** remains as an adjective even after the additional prefix to form the word **invalid**.

Considering there is no occurrence of grammatical change in **invalid**, there is instead a semantic change within the derivational process. That is, the meaning of the base word has changed with the addition of the prefix. To identify the semantic change, the meaning of the base and the derived word is compared. **Valid** is defined as an adjective meaning “based on truth or reason; able

to be accepted” (“Valid,” n.d.). Meanwhile, **invalid** is an adjective meaning “not true or acceptable, or not correctly thought out” (“Invalid,” n.d.). By comparing the two definitions, it can be seen that there is a change through the added meaning of negation to the original semantic properties of the base word.

[Data 2] (It's no more than cultural, you and me **inseparable**) (Wood, 2020c)

The second data can be found within the song *Laplace’s Angel*, in which the word **inseparable** occurs. This word uses the very same prefix as the first data. The prefix *in-* is combined with the base word **separable** to create the word. As the *in-* prefix does not cause changes in the grammatical properties of a word, the base word is not altered from its grammatical class as an adjective with the addition of the prefix.

Instead of grammatical change, the word **separable** experiences a semantic change, that is, alteration in the meaning of the word. Separable is an adjective meaning “able to be separated from each other” (“Separable,” n.d.). Meanwhile, **inseparable** is an adjective with the meaning of “(of two or more people) such good friends that they spend most of their time together, or (of two or more things) so closely connected that they cannot be considered separately” (“Inseparable,” n.d.). Here, it can be seen that the addition of the prefix *-in* adds the semantic property of negation to the base word, creating a different meaning from the original definition.

The structure of the word formations using derivational prefixes are detailed in the table below:

Table 1. Structure of derivational morphemes with prefixes

Word	Affix	Base word	Affix
Invalid	In-	valid	

Inseparable	In-	separable	
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Derivational Morphemes through Suffixes

A suffix is an affix that must appear to the right of the base with which it is combined (Fábregas & Scalise, 2025, p. 10). Therefore, derivational suffixes refer to the suffixes by which derivational processes can occur. O'Grady et al. (2017) provides several examples of this type of suffixes, including: *-able*, *-ing*, *-ive*, *-al*, *-ant*, *-(at)ion*, *-er*, *-ment*, *-dom*, *-ful*, *-(i)al*, *-(i)an*, *-ic*, *-less*, *-ous*, *-ize*, *-ish*, *-ate*, *-en*, *-ly*, *-ity*, and *-ness*. These suffixes cause grammatical alterations to the base word.

Majority of the data found within the data sources are classified as derivational morphemes through suffixes. There are some suffix types that occur multiple times across different derivational morphemes. Not all of these iterations is discussed within this subsection. Instead, two examples at most are provided for each type of derivational suffix found within the data sources.

[Data 3] It's been a point of **contention** between myself and this body that they stuck me in (Wood, 2020b)

The word **contention** appears within the song *I/Me/Myself*. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the verb **[to] contend** with the suffix *-ion*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from a verb into the noun **contention** ("Contend," n.d.; "Contention," n.d.).

[Data 4] You'd look through illusions, **hallucinations**, and lucid dream (Wood, 2020b)

The use of the *-ion* suffix also appears in the song *2econd 2ight 2eer*. It occurs within the usage of the word **hallucination(s)**. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the verb **[to] hallucinate** with the suffix *-ion*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical

class from a verb into the noun **hallucination** ("Hallucinate," n.d.; "Hallucination," n.d.).

[Data 5] Let me be the void you fill with taxidermy fingerprints, **taxonomize** our differences (Wood, 2020b)

In the song *I/Me/Myself*, there is an occurrence of the word **taxonomize**. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the noun **taxonomy** with the suffix *-ize*. This particular word does not yet exist within the Cambridge Dictionary as an entry. However, the principle of the word formation follows the pattern as identified by O'Grady et al. (2017). O'Grady et al. (2017) identifies that the suffix *-ize* can alter a noun into a verb or an adjective into a verb. Therefore, taking into account the original grammatical properties of the base word, **taxonomy** experiences a change in its grammatical class from a noun into the verb **taxonomize** (O'Grady et al., 2017, p. 131; "Taxonomy," n.d.).

[Data 6] It doesn't take a **killer** to murder (Wood, 2020c)

The word **killer** appears within the song *Laplace's Angel*. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the verb **[to] kill** with the suffix *-er*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from a verb into the noun **killer** ("Kill," n.d.; "Killer," n.d.).

[Data 7] (Still **forsaken** shoulders fall silent now) (Wood, 2020c)

Another derivational morpheme that appears in *Laplace's Angel* is the word **forsaken**. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the verb **[to] forsake** with the suffix *-en*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from a verb into the adjective **forsaken** ("Forsake," n.d.; "Forsaken," n.d.).

[Data 8] (It's no more than **cultural**, you and me inseparable) (Wood, 2020c)

The word **cultural** also appears within the song *Laplace's Angel*. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the noun **culture** with the suffix *-al*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from a noun into the adjective **cultural** ("Cultural," n.d.; "Culture," n.d.).

[Data 9] (Any form **mechanical**, thank you God) (Wood, 2020c)

Aside from **cultural**, the suffix *-al* appears again within the same song within the word **mechanical**. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the noun **mechanic** with the suffix *-al*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from a noun into the adjective **mechanical** ("Cultural," n.d.; "Culture," n.d.).

[Data 10] So tie me to the train tracks, laugh and **snidely** twist your mustache (Wood, 2022)

Moving onto the next data source, the word **snidely** occurs within the song *The Main Character*. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the adjective **snide** with the suffix *-ly*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from an adjective into the adverb **snidely** ("Snide," n.d.; "Snidely," n.d.).

[Data 11] All identities are **equally** invalid (Wood, 2020b)

The suffix *-ly* also appears in *Laplace's Angel* within the word **equally**. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the adjective **equal** with the suffix *-ly*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from an adjective into the adverb **equally** ("Equal," n.d.; "Equally," n.d.).

[Data 12] How I cannot commit to **reality**, when my third eye's open and I like what I see (Wood, 2020a)

The word **reality** makes an appearance in *2econd 2ight 2eer*. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the adjective **real** with the suffix *-ity*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from an adjective into the noun **reality** ("Real," n.d.; "Reality," n.d.).

[Data 13] Forget bored stiff, I got rigor mortis, call it morbid **curiosity** (Wood, 2020a)

In the same song, the word **curiosity** also occurs. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the adjective **curious** with the suffix *-ity*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from an adjective into the noun **curiosity** ("Curiosity," n.d.; "Curious," n.d.).

[Data 14] And I know that **meaning** can be such a pretty thing to keep (Wood, 2020a)

The word **meaning** appears within the song *2econd 2ight 2eer*. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the verb **[to] mean** with the suffix *-ing*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from a verb into the noun **meaning** ("Mean," n.d.; "Meaning," n.d.).

[Data 15] But I ain't done a **fucking** thing to you (Wood, 2020a)

The suffix *-ing* is also used in the other data sources, particularly in *The Main Character*, in the word **fucking**, which is an expletive used to emphasize anger. It is a derivational morpheme created through the combination of the verb **[to] fuck** with the suffix *-ing*. The base word experiences a change in its grammatical class from

a verb into **fucking**, which in this instance is used an adjective to the noun *thing*, but can also be used as an adverb (“Fuck,” n.d.; “Fucking,” n.d.).

The structure of the word formations using derivational suffixes are as detailed below:

Table 2. Structure of derivational morphemes with suffixes

Word	Affix	Base word	Affix
Contention		Contend	-ion
Hallucination		Hallucinate	-ion
Taxonomize		Taxonomy	-ize
Killer		Kill	-er
Forsaken		Forsake	-en
Cultural		Culture	-al
Mechanical		Mechanic	-al
Snidely		Snide	-ly
Equally		Equal	-ly
Reality		Real	-ity
Curiosity		Curious	-ity
Meaning		Mean	-ing
Fucking		Fuck	-ing

4. Conclusion

From the analysis of the data, it can be concluded that both prefixes and suffixes were used in the derivational process of word formation within the selected Will Wood songs. However, only one type of prefix was identified to be present within the data sources, that is, the prefix *-in*. The prefix does not alter the grammatical properties of the base word, but instead alters the meaning through the addition of the semantic property of negation. Derivational suffixes occur at a much greater frequency, with the types identified across the four data sources being: *-ion*, *-ize*, *-er*, *-en*, *-al*, *-ly*, *-ity*, and *-ing*. These derivational suffixes are shown to alter the grammatical class of the base word, including the alteration from verb to noun, noun to verb, verb to adjective, noun to adjective, adjective to adverb, adjective to noun, and verb to adverb. Therefore, both types of derivational

affixes as well as grammatical and semantic alterations were found in the selected Will Wood songs.

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