

A Morphological Analysis of Inflectional Morphemes in *Me Before You* Movie

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of English inflectional morphemes in the spoken dialogues of the two main characters, Louisa Clark and William Traynor, in the film *Me Before You*. The objectives are to identify the types and functions of inflectional morphemes used, as well as to determine the most dominant form found in the characters' utterances. Inflectional morphemes, which do not change the basic meaning or word class, provide grammatical information such as tense, number, aspect, possession, and degree of comparison. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, using the film and its transcripts as the primary sources. Data were analyzed using both formal and informal methods. The formal method was used to calculate the frequency of each morpheme, while the informal method was applied to interpret the function of each morpheme in context, based on the theoretical framework by Fromkin et al. The results reveal all eight types of English inflectional morphemes occurred in the data, with the most dominant being the plural marker morpheme *-s*, which appeared 54 times. The analysis demonstrates that inflectional morphemes are not only essential in shaping grammatical accuracy but also contribute meaningfully to character development and narrative clarity. This research highlights how minor grammatical elements can play a significant role in conveying meaning in naturalistic dialogues. It is expected that this study will offer valuable insight into the application of morphological theory in media discourse and support further research in both linguistics and film studies.

Keywords: *inflectional morpheme, morphology, movie,*

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INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a fundamental tool for human communication, shaping the way individuals convey thoughts, emotions, and intentions. Understanding the structural elements of language is essential for both native and non-native speakers to achieve effective communication. One of the core areas in the study of linguistics is morphology, which investigates how words are formed and how they function within syntactic structures. As defined by Lieber, 2016, morphology includes the creation of new words as well as the variation of word forms depending on sentence structure and usage. Central to morphological analysis is the concept of morphemes, described by Haspelmath (2002, p.16) as the smallest meaningful units of a linguistic expression.

These units play a critical role in constructing meaning by providing grammatical information such as tense, number, possession, and comparison, thereby contributing to the coherence and clarity of both oral and written communication.

Morphemes are broadly classified into two categories: free morphemes and bound morphemes (Yule, 2010, p. 63). Free morphemes function independently as words, while bound morphemes must be attached to a base or root word to convey meaning. Bound morphemes are further divided into derivational and inflectional morphemes. Derivational morphemes typically alter the meaning or part of speech of the base word, enabling the creation of new lexical items. In contrast, inflectional morphemes modify a word's grammatical features, such as tense, aspect, number, or degree, without changing its core meaning or syntactic category. According to Fromkin et al. (2014), English includes eight inflectional morphemes: *-s* (third-person singular), *-ed* (past tense), *-ing* (progressive), *-en* (past participle), *-s* (plural), *'s* (possessive), *-er* (comparative), and *-est* (superlative). These grammatical markers are fundamental in maintaining syntactic agreement and clarity, ensuring that linguistic expressions are both meaningful and structurally coherent.

Although inflectional morphemes have been extensively discussed in linguistic theory, their application in naturally occurring, spontaneous language, especially in media such as film, has not received sufficient scholarly attention. While many studies have explored morphology in formal contexts like political speeches, academic texts, or literary works, there remains a gap in examining how these morphemes are utilized in cinematic dialogue, which often mirrors real-life conversation and emotional interaction. Films provide a unique and rich linguistic environment in which characters use language in contextually grounded and emotionally charged exchanges, making them a valuable yet underutilized source for morphological analysis.

This research responds to that gap by examining the use of inflectional morphemes in the spoken utterances of the two main characters, Louisa Clark and William Traynor, in the movie *Me Before You*. Known for its naturalistic dialogue and emotional intensity, the film offers fertile ground for observing how grammatical structures are employed to reflect human experiences and relationships. Utilizing the framework proposed by Fromkin et al. (2014), the study aims to identify the types and grammatical functions of inflectional morphemes, determine which morphemes are most frequently used, and analyse their role in constructing meaning and maintaining communicative clarity throughout the narrative.

By examining the morphology embedded within film dialogue, this study contributes to the broader field of linguistic analysis, bridging the disciplines of linguistics and media studies. It highlights the importance of recognizing grammar not only as a set of rules but as an active and dynamic component of real-world communication. Moreover, the study emphasizes the pedagogical potential of media as authentic linguistic input, especially for learners aiming to grasp the subtleties of English morphology in everyday conversation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Morphology, as a core component of linguistic study, has received significant scholarly attention, particularly regarding its two primary branches: derivational and inflectional morphemes. Inflectional morphemes are especially important in understanding the grammatical structure of a language because they convey syntactic information such as tense, number, possession, and degree, without altering the base meaning or grammatical category of a word (Fromkin et al., 2014). These morphemes ensure clarity and grammatical agreement in both spoken and written discourse, forming the foundation for sentence cohesion and meaning-making.

Numerous studies have applied morphological analysis to various forms of discourse, contributing both theoretical insights and methodological models for analyzing morphemes. Henisah (2021), for instance, analyzed derivational and inflectional morphemes in political speeches by President Joko Widodo. This study demonstrated how morphological choices are employed to maintain a formal tone and enhance rhetorical effectiveness. Methodologically, it showcased the viability of applying morphological theory to public, scripted speech.

Similarly, Arfandi (2024) investigated the use of inflectional morphemes in the *Encanto* movie script. By focusing on dialogue within an animated film, the study underscored the role of inflectional forms in expressing time, plurality, and subject-verb agreement, which are essential in developing narrative coherence and character interaction. This research also illustrated how inflection functions in stylized, yet conversational language, highlighting its relevance in media discourse.

In journalistic writing, Maulidina et al. (2019) examined derivational and inflectional morphemes in *The Jakarta Post*. Their findings revealed how morphological patterns shape the formal and informative tone of news articles, offering a textual lens for understanding the linguistic construction of media objectivity. Hutasoit et al. (2024) further contributed to literary morphological studies by analyzing Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Their work identified how historical English texts utilize inflectional affixes to achieve poetic rhythm and emotional emphasis, demonstrating the literary function of morphology in early modern English.

Jimmi and Sulaeman (2022) conducted a morphological study on Dwayne Johnson's motivational speeches. This research showed how derivational and inflectional morphemes are used to emphasize key messages, reinforce motivational themes, and provide stylistic variety. Through a speech-based corpus, the authors highlighted how inflection can contribute to persuasiveness in oral performance.

These studies collectively affirm the applicability of morphological theory, especially the framework proposed by Fromkin et al. (2014), to diverse contexts such as political rhetoric, literature, journalism, and film scripts. However, a noticeable gap remains in the examination of inflectional morphemes specifically within spontaneous, emotionally expressive movie dialogues. While previous studies have largely focused on scripted or written language, emotionally driven cinematic discourse offers a naturalistic setting that reflects real-life conversational patterns, yet remains underexplored in morphological research.

This study addresses that gap by analyzing inflectional morphemes in the spoken interactions of Louisa Clark and William Traynor in the movie *Me Before You*. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach enriched by quantitative frequency analysis, combining structural and functional perspectives on morphology. Theoretically, it contributes to our understanding of how grammatical forms are employed in media to construct meaning, portray character emotion, and maintain syntactic coherence in dialogic narrative. This review, therefore, situates the present study at the intersection of linguistics, media discourse, and grammar in context.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the use of inflectional morphemes in the spoken dialogues of the main characters in the movie *Me Before You*. The methodology was designed to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret the types and functions of inflectional morphemes, as well as to determine which forms appear most dominantly in the characters' speech. The research utilized both documentary analysis and content analysis techniques, using the movie and its transcript as the primary data sources. The analytical process

was guided by morphological theory, particularly the framework of Fromkin et al. (2014), and applied both formal and informal methods of linguistic data presentation as proposed by Sudaryanto (2015).

The subjects of this research are the spoken utterances produced by Louisa Clark and William Traynor, the two main characters in the movie *Me Before You*. These characters were deliberately selected due to their prominence in the narrative and the frequency of their dialogues, which provided a rich and representative sample of natural language use. Their conversations encapsulate various grammatical structures, offering an ideal dataset for morphological analysis focused on inflectional morphemes.

To support the analysis, morphological theory from Fromkin et al. was used as the guiding framework in identifying and classifying both the types and grammatical functions of inflectional morphemes. Additional supporting theories and references were also consulted to strengthen the analytical validity of the research.

The data collection process involved multiple viewings of the movie to fully understand the context and nuances of the characters' speech. After ensuring contextual accuracy, the relevant spoken utterances of Louisa and Will were extracted from the transcript. Each utterance was examined to locate the presence of inflectional morphemes. Every instance was then coded manually, with attention to its position in the sentence, word class, and surrounding grammatical context. These instances were subsequently categorized into their corresponding morphological types.

The formal method was applied to quantify the occurrence of each inflectional morpheme, allowing the researcher to determine the frequency and most dominant types of morphemes used. The results were organized into tables for clarity and easier interpretation. The informal method was used to conduct qualitative interpretation of the grammatical functions of each identified morpheme, examining how they contribute to meaning-making within the dialogues. This involved discussing each morpheme in its natural linguistic context and exploring its syntactic role within the sentence structure. All data were analyzed using the theoretical framework provided by Fromkin et al. (2014), ensuring that the classification and interpretation were consistent with established morphological theory.

RESULTS

The analysis of the dialogues from the main characters in *Me Before You* revealed a total of eight types of inflectional morphemes. These morphemes were identified and counted to determine their frequency of occurrence in the movie. The findings are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Frequency of Inflectional Morphemes in the Movie *Me Before You*

No.	Inflectional Morpheme Type	Frequency
1	Third-person singular (-s)	17
2	Past tense (-ed)	47
3	Progressive (-ing)	43
4	Past participle (-en)	6

No.	Inflectional Morpheme Type	Frequency
5	Plural (-s)	54
6	Possessive (-'s)	5
7	Comparative (-er)	4
8	Superlative (-est)	1
	Total	177

1. Third-Person Singular Present

There are 17 instances of the third-person singular present inflectional morpheme *-s* found in the main characters' dialogues in *Me Before You*. The following is an analysis of one of the examples:

Data 1: "So, I could take you to a Shakespeare Festival *happens* today and tomorrow."

The word *happens* in this sentence is an inflected form of the verb *happen*. It illustrates the use of the third-person singular present morpheme by the addition of the suffix *-s* to the base verb. The base form *happen* functions as a verb, and in this construction, the suffix *-s* is added to indicate that the subject is third-person singular, *Festival*. This affixation does not alter the meaning or the word class of the root word but serves a grammatical purpose, maintaining subject-verb agreement in the present tense. Therefore, *happens* is an example of a third-person singular present inflectional morpheme in use.

2. Past Tense

There are 47 instances of the past tense inflectional morpheme *-ed* found in the dialogues of the main characters in *Me Before You*. The following is one example from the data:

Data 2: "They *wanted* me to invite you to my birthday dinner next Thursday, but don't worry."

The word *wanted* in this sentence is an inflected form of the base verb *want*. The addition of the suffix *-ed* marks the verb as past tense, indicating that the desire occurred at a time prior to the moment of speaking. The morpheme *-ed* does not change the core meaning or word class of the verb; it solely modifies the tense. This use demonstrates the grammatical function of the past tense inflectional morpheme, showing that the action or state expressed by the verb is situated in the past. Therefore, *wanted* is a clear example of a verb inflected with the past tense morpheme *-ed*.

3. Progressive (-ing)

There are 43 occurrences of the progressive inflectional morpheme *-ing* in the main characters' dialogues in *Me Before You*. The following is one of the examples:

Data 3: "I'm just *trying* to do my job, as best I can."

The word *trying* is derived from the base verb *try*, with the addition of the inflectional suffix *-ing*. This morpheme marks the verb as present progressive, indicating that the action is ongoing or currently happening. The morpheme *-ing* does not alter the core meaning or grammatical category of the verb; instead, it conveys aspectual information

about the duration or continuity of the action. In this context, *trying* illustrates the use of the progressive aspect to express an ongoing effort.

4. Past Participle (-en)

There are 6 occurrences of the past participle inflectional morpheme *-en* in the data. One example is presented below:

Data 4: “I wish I had never *taken* this stupid job.”

The word *taken* is the past participle form of the verb *take*, created by attaching the *-en* suffix. This morpheme signifies that the verb is in its past participle form, typically used in perfect tenses or passive constructions. In this sentence, *taken* occurs as part of the past perfect construction (*had taken*), indicating an action completed before another time in the past. The *-en* morpheme retains the verb’s word class and meaning while supplying syntactic information about aspect, thus fulfilling its function as an inflectional morpheme.

5. Plural (-s)

There are 54 instances of the plural inflectional morpheme *-s* found in the dialogues of the main characters in *Me Before You*. Below is one example:

Data 5: “Well, I don’t want those *pictures* staring at me.”

The word *pictures* is the plural form of the noun *picture*, formed by adding the *-s* suffix. This inflectional morpheme functions to indicate that the noun is more than one in number. The addition of *-s* does not change the core meaning or part of speech of the word; *picture* remains a noun. Instead, it adds grammatical information regarding quantity. In this context, *pictures* reflect the use of the plural morpheme to denote multiple images, thus fulfilling the function of expressing number.

6. Possessive (-’s)

There are 5 occurrences of the possessive inflectional morpheme *-’s* in the main character dialogues. The example below illustrates one of them:

Data 6: “*Alicia’s* wedding.”

The word *Alicia’s* demonstrates possession through the addition of the inflectional morpheme *’s* to the proper noun *Alicia*. This morpheme indicates ownership or association between *Alicia* and the noun *wedding*. It does not affect the word class of the noun but provides syntactic information, establishing a possessive relationship. In this sentence, *Alicia’s wedding* implies that the wedding belongs to or is associated with Alicia, clearly illustrating the possessive function of the *’s* morpheme.

7. Comparative (-er)

There were four occurrences of the comparative inflectional morpheme *-er* in the dialogues. One example can be seen in the sentence:

Data 7: “Wow, your life’s even *duller* than mine.”

The word *duller* is the comparative form of the adjective *dull*. The addition of the *-er* suffix indicates a comparative degree, expressing a higher level of a quality between two entities, in this case, the life of the listener compared to that of the speaker. The morpheme *-er* does not alter the word class, as it remains an adjective, nor does it change the core meaning. Instead, it provides grammatical information used to compare attributes, which is essential in describing characters’ perceptions and experiences in the narrative.

8. Superlative (-est)

The superlative morpheme *-est* appeared once in the data. The relevant example is:

Data 8: "... at me one day and feel even the *tiniest* bit of regret or pity."

The word *tiniest* is formed by attaching the *-est* suffix to the adjective *tiny*, marking it as a superlative. This form is used to indicate the highest degree of a quality, expressing that the *bit* of regret or pity is as small as possible. Similar to other inflectional morphemes, *-est* does not change the grammatical category of the base word and solely functions to express grammatical comparison. This use contributes to the emotional subtlety of the character's expression, reinforcing the delicate nature of their concerns.

As shown in Table 1, The plural morpheme *-s* appeared as the most frequently used inflectional morpheme, indicating its dominant role in the dialogues of the movie *Me Before You*. This suggests that the characters often referred to multiple entities or concepts during their conversations. The past tense marker *-ed* followed as the second most common, highlighting instances where the characters recalled past actions, events, or experiences, which still reflects the film's reflective and emotionally driven narrative. The progressive aspect marker *-ing* ranked third, demonstrating how ongoing actions or continuous states were frequently conveyed in the characters' interactions. Less frequent morphemes included the possessive marker *-s*, which indicates ownership or association, the past participle *-en*, typically used in perfect and passive constructions, as well as the comparative *-er* and superlative *-est* forms used to express degrees of comparison.

These results provide a comprehensive overview of how inflectional morphemes were distributed in the speech of the film's main characters, Louisa Clark and William Traynor. The frequency pattern observed reflects the grammatical choices made in naturalistic dialogue within cinematic storytelling. The data suggest that certain grammatical structures, particularly those related to time reference and quantity, are more prevalent in filmic conversation, which may be due to the narrative's emphasis on recounting past events and expressing personal perspectives. Overall, the table underscores the relative prominence and communicative function of each inflectional morpheme type in shaping the grammatical and emotional clarity of the movie's spoken interactions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that inflectional morphemes are widely used in the dialogues of both protagonists in *Me Before You*, reflecting the grammatical structures necessary for effective and natural communication. Among the eight types identified, the plural marker morpheme *-s* emerged as the most frequently used. This prevalence suggests that the characters frequently refer to multiple entities or concepts, which aligns with the film's emotion-driven narrative centered on relationships, interactions, and the complexity of human connections.

The frequent occurrence of the progressive form *-ing* also indicates the importance of describing ongoing actions and circumstances throughout the movie, which contributes to the dynamic depiction of emotional and physical events. Meanwhile, the less frequent use of the past participle form *-en*, possessive, comparative *-er*, and superlative *-est* indicates a more specific or limited grammatical role in conversation. However, their presence, though limited, still plays a meaningful role in adding grammatical precision and nuance to character interactions.

The results of this study reinforce the theory proposed by Fromkin et al. (2014) who identify inflectional morphemes as important components in sentence construction, providing important grammatical information without changing the core meaning of the word. Moreover, the use of these morphemes in cinematic dialog supports the idea that scripted language in films can reflect authentic and spontaneous speech, especially when describing intimate, emotional or personal exchanges.

Moreover, the results of this study confirm and extend the findings of previous studies, such as Arfandi's (2024) analysis of *Encanto* and Henisah's (2021) study of Joko Widodo's speeches, which both found that the past tense and progressive tense are the most prevalent inflectional morphemes found in spoken texts. What sets this study apart is its focus on narrative-rich and emotionally charged films, which provides further evidence of the relationship between grammatical choice and storytelling.

Ultimately, this study highlights how inflectional morphemes, though often overlooked in broader linguistic discussions, serve as foundational grammar that supports coherence, clarity, and expressiveness in language use in both real and fictional languages. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how grammar operates not only mechanistically, but also meaningfully, in making language coherent and expressive.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the use of inflectional morphemes in the spoken dialogues of the two main characters in the movie *Me Before You*, focusing on identifying their types, analyzing their grammatical functions, and determining which forms appear most frequently. The analysis revealed that all eight types of inflectional morphemes proposed by Fromkin et al. are present in the data, with the plural morpheme *-s* being the most dominant, occurring 54 times. This dominance suggests a strong narrative emphasis on multiple objects and entities, which aligns with the emotional and reflective tone of the film. Other morphemes, such as *-ed* (past tense), *-s* (third-person singular), *-ing* (progressive), and *-en* (past participle), also appeared frequently, indicating the diverse grammatical strategies used to convey meaning, actions, and relationships between the characters.

The findings confirm that even subtle grammatical elements like inflectional morphemes play a crucial role in shaping character interaction, emotional expression, and narrative flow. Through both formal and informal methods of analysis, the study demonstrates how morphology operates in authentic language use, particularly in media discourse.

However, this research is not without limitations. It is confined to only two characters from a single movie, which may not provide a fully comprehensive picture of inflectional morpheme usage across genres or different linguistic contexts. Moreover, the analysis focused solely on English, without cross-linguistic comparison or sociolinguistic variation.

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