

## UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF ZERO MORPHEMES.

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**Abstract** *This research article explores the intricate nature of zero morphemes, often referred to as "meaningful absence" in morphological theory. While overt morphemes are identified by their phonetic presence, zero morphemes function as silent yet critical markers within linguistic paradigms. The study delves into the structural necessity of null elements in English, Russian, and Uzbek, analyzing how they facilitate the principle of linguistic economy. By examining the historical evolution of the concept from Ferdinand de Saussure to modern generative grammar, the article argues that zero morphemes are indispensable for maintaining systematic balance in language. The findings suggest that identifying zero morphemes is crucial for accurate semantic decoding and grammatical analysis.*

**Keywords:** *Zero morpheme, morphological paradigm, linguistic economy, null allomorph, structural linguistics, grammatical category, covert marking.*

**Annotatsiya.** *Ushbu ilmiy maqola morfologiya nazariyasida "mazmunli yo‘qlik" deb ataluvchi nol morfemalarning murakkab tabiatini tadqiq etadi. Ochiq morfemalar o‘zlarining fonetik mavjudligi bilan aniqlansa, nol morfemalar lisoniy paradigmalar ichida jim, ammo o‘ta muhim ko‘rsatkich bo‘lib xizmat qiladi. Tadqiqot ingliz, rus va o‘zbek tillaridagi nol birliklarning tarkibiy zaruratini ko‘rib chiqadi va ularning til iqtisodi tamoyiliga qanday xizmat qilishini tahlil qiladi. Ferdinand de Sossyurdan tortib zamonaviy generativ grammatikagacha bo‘lgan konsepsiyalarni o‘rganib, maqola nol morfemalarning tildagi tizimli muvozanatni saqlashdagi o‘rnini asoslab beradi.*

**Kalit so‘zlar:** *Nol morfema, morfologik paradigma, til iqtisodi, nol allomorf, struktural tilshunoslik, grammatik kategoriya, yashirin ko‘rsatkich.*

**Аннотация.** *Данная научная статья исследует сложную природу нулевых морфем, часто называемых «значимым отсутствием» в морфологической теории. В то время как явные морфемы определяются их фонетическим присутствием, нулевые морфемы функционируют как молчаливые, но важные маркеры внутри лингвистических парадигм. Исследование углубляется в структурную необходимость нулевых элементов в английском, русском и узбекском языках, анализируя, как они способствуют принципу языковой экономии. Рассматривая историческую эволюцию концепции от Фердинанда де Соссюра до современной генеративной грамматики,*

*автор утверждает, что нулевые морфемы незаменимы для поддержания системного баланса в языке.*

**Ключевые слова:** Нулевая морфема, морфологическая парадигма, языковая экономия, нулевой алломорф, структурная лингвистика, грамматическая категория.

## INTRODUCTION

In the field of morphology, the identification of meaningful units—morphemes—is traditionally based on their material realization through phonemes or graphemes. However, as linguistic science evolved, it became evident that meaning is not always tethered to audible sound. One of the most fascinating phenomena in structural linguistics is the zero morpheme (also known as a null morpheme). A zero morpheme is a functional unit that has no phonetic expression but carries significant grammatical information [6].

The primary objective of this article is to examine how "silence" functions as a grammatical tool. By investigating the structural role of zero morphemes across diverse linguistic systems, we aim to demonstrate that the absence of a physical marker is a systematic choice made by languages to optimize communication. The significance of this study lies in its potential to clarify complex word-formation processes and improve the accuracy of morphological parsing in both theoretical and applied linguistics[1].

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: THE CONCEPT OF MEANINGFUL ABSENCE

The concept of the zero morpheme is deeply rooted in the history of linguistics, dating back to the ancient Indian grammarian Panini. However, it gained prominence in the West through the works of Ferdinand de Saussure, who defined language as a "system of differences"[3]. According to Saussure, a signifier is defined not only by what it is but also by what it is not. If a specific category in a language (such as the plural number) is marked by a suffix, the absence of that suffix in a parallel form (the singular) becomes a "meaningful absence"[5].

Structuralists like Leonard Bloomfield and Zellig Harris further refined this by introducing the term null allomorph. They argued that if a paradigm is to remain symmetrical, every slot must be filled. If a physical morpheme is missing, a "zero" placeholder is inserted to maintain the integrity of the grammatical system[4].

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ZERO MORPHEMES

### 1. Zero Morphemes in the English Language

English, being a predominantly analytical language with remnants of a synthetic past, utilizes zero morphemes in several key areas:

**Number Marking:** In most English nouns, the plural is marked by the suffix -s (e.g., books). However, nouns like sheep, deer, and fish do not change form. In these cases, the plural is signaled by a zero morpheme [∅], which is understood through context or syntax[1].

**Tense and Aspect:** Certain irregular verbs do not use the standard -ed suffix for the past tense. For instance, the past tense of set or put is identical to the present. Linguists analyze these as having a zero suffix that denotes the past tense.

## 2. The Role of Zero Endings in Russian

Russian is a highly synthetic language where inflections (endings) provide most of the grammatical information. The "нулевое окончание" (zero ending) is a fundamental part of its grammar:[6]

**Gender and Case:** In the word стол (table), the absence of an ending in the nominative case signals that the noun is masculine and singular. This contrasts with стола (genitive) or столу (dative), where the endings are overt.

**Verbal Forms:** In the past tense, masculine verbs often have a zero ending (e.g., читал-∅), whereas feminine (читала) and neuter (читало) forms have overt vowels.

## 3. Zero Morphemes in the Uzbek Language

As an agglutinative language, Uzbek typically uses a "one-to-one" correspondence between a morpheme and its meaning. Nevertheless, zero morphemes are essential[2]:

**Person-Number Markers:** In the conjugation of verbs, the third-person singular often lacks a suffix. For example, in u bordi-∅ (he/she went), the zero morpheme distinguishes it from bordim (I went)[2].

**The Nominative Case:** Like many Turkic languages, the nominative case (bosh kelishik) is unmarked. The word kitob-∅ is identified as being in the nominative case precisely because it lacks the suffixes of other cases like -ning or -ni[2].

## THE PRINCIPLE OF LINGUISTIC ECONOMY

One might ask: why don't languages simply mark everything? The answer lies in Linguistic Economy. Human communication is governed by the law of least effort [1]. High-frequency categories—those used most often—tend to be the shortest. Since the singular number, the nominative case, and the third-person singular are statistically the most common forms in speech, leaving them unmarked (using a zero morpheme) saves time and energy for both the speaker and the listener[6]. This is a manifestation of Zipf's Law, which states that the length of a word is inversely proportional to its frequency of use.

## CONCLUSION

Zero morphemes are a testament to the structural sophistication of human language. They prove that language is not merely a collection of sounds but a highly organized system of relationships and contrasts [3]. By utilizing zero morphemes, languages achieve a balance

between complexity and efficiency, ensuring that essential grammatical information is conveyed without unnecessary redundancy[4].

Our analysis shows that identifying these "silent" markers is vital for: Precise Morphological Analysis: Understanding that a lack of a suffix is an active grammatical choice. Cross-Linguistic Studies: Comparing how different languages utilize null elements to solve the same structural problems. Language Education: Helping students recognize hidden patterns in verb conjugations and noun declensions. In final analysis, the zero morpheme is a "meaningful silence" that speaks volumes about the underlying logic of our speech.

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