

ADJECTIVE SUFFIXATION AND STYLISTIC MEANING IN FRANZ KAFKA'S *THE METAMORPHOSIS*

Palqi Wijdani, Nurholis, Toneng Listiani

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

E-mail: palqi041204@gmail.com

Received: 2026-05-08

Accepted: 2026-06-04

Published: 2026-06-15

Abstract

This study examines adjective-forming suffixation in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* by integrating derivational morphological analysis with stylistic interpretation. The study aims to identify the types and frequencies of adjective-forming suffixes and to explore their contribution to the novel's thematic and stylistic construction. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach supported by quantitative frequency analysis, the data were collected from the English translation of *The Metamorphosis* and analyzed using theories of derivational morphology proposed by Katamba (2018), Plag (2018), and related scholars. The analysis identified 73 valid instances of adjective-forming suffixation distributed across eighteen suffix types. The most productive suffixes were -ful (13 instances), -al (8 instances), -y (7 instances), and -less (6 instances). The findings indicate that most derived adjectives function as qualitative adjectives, describing emotional states, psychological conditions, and physical characteristics, while relational adjectives primarily establish social and contextual relationships. The distribution of suffixes reveals a significant increase in adjective use in the final chapter, corresponding to the intensification of Gregor Samsa's psychological decline and social isolation. Furthermore, suffixes such as -ful and -less contribute to the representation of suffering, vulnerability, powerlessness, and alienation, which constitute central themes of the novel. The study concludes that adjective-forming suffixation functions not only as a productive morphological process but also as a stylistic resource that supports characterization, thematic development, and meaning construction in literary discourse.

Keywords: *adjective suffixation; English morphology; literary text; relational adjectives; qualitative adjectives; stylistic meaning*

1. Introduction

Language in literary texts functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a tool for constructing meaning, atmosphere, and psychological depth (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004). One linguistic aspect that plays an important role in this process is derivational morphology, particularly suffixation, which enables the formation of new words and the extension of lexical and semantic meaning (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011; Bauer et al., 2013; Katamba, 2018).

Derivational morphology is considered one of the most productive mechanisms in English word formation because it allows speakers and writers to create new lexical items through affixation processes (Schmidtke et al., 2018; Baayen et al., 2019). In English, suffixation frequently changes both grammatical category and semantic meaning, allowing nouns and verbs to function as adjectives with descriptive and evaluative meanings. According to Carstairs-McCarthy (2002), derivational processes reflect the productivity and flexibility of language structure. Similarly, Yule (2014) explains that affixation contributes significantly to vocabulary development because it enables language users to construct expressions that suit communicative and contextual purposes.

In literary texts, morphological choices often contribute to stylistic and narrative effects, influencing readers' interpretation, emotional engagement, and understanding of literary meaning (Fernandez-Quintanilla & Stradling, 2023; Scapin et al., 2023). The use of adjective-forming suffixes can strengthen characterization, emotional atmosphere, and descriptive intensity within a narrative (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2023; Lastari & Winarta, 2025). Functional linguistic perspectives emphasize that lexical and grammatical choices are closely related to meaning-making processes in discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Therefore, examining adjective suffixation in literary works can provide deeper insight into how linguistic forms contribute to narrative representation and psychological expression.

In this context, *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka contains rich descriptive and psychologically intense language, making it an appropriate text for examining adjective formation (Kafka, 2005; Toolan, 1998). The narrative's focus on alienation, transformation, and inner experience relies heavily on descriptive expressions, many of which are realized through adjective suffixation (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2023). These linguistic patterns contribute to the representation of psychological states throughout the narrative. Descriptive adjectives guide readers' interpretation of Gregor Samsa's psychological struggles, illustrating how morphological choices shape literary perception and reinforce narrative meaning (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004).

However, previous studies on derivational morphology have largely focused on non-literary discourse or general language use (Schmidtke et al., 2018; Günther & Marelli, 2020). Limited studies examine how adjective suffixation functions specifically in literary narratives, particularly in relation to descriptive and psychological effects (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2023; Lastari & Winarta, 2025). Furthermore, existing studies tend to emphasize structural aspects of word formation while giving less attention to the stylistic and interpretive functions of derivational morphology in literary texts. This gap is significant because literary meaning is often constructed through subtle linguistic choices that influence readers' perceptions of characters, themes, and emotional experiences (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* by focusing on the relationship between morphological structure and narrative function (Katamba, 2018; Lieber, 2004). By using a literary text as the data source, this study provides empirical evidence of how suffixation operates in authentic contexts. More importantly, this study contributes to bridging linguistic analysis and literary studies by demonstrating that morphological processes function not only structurally but also stylistically in constructing narrative meaning. The findings are expected to enrich discussions of derivational morphology in literary discourse and provide further evidence

that morphological choices contribute to characterization, thematic development, and psychological representation in narrative texts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Derivational Morphology and Suffixation

Morphology examines the internal structure of words and the processes of word formation, including derivation through affixation. Lieber (2010) argues that derivation may change both the grammatical category and meaning of a base word. Similarly, Bauer (2003) states that suffixation is one of the most productive word-formation processes in English because it systematically creates new lexical items. Derivational processes therefore play an important role in expanding vocabulary and constructing meaning in language use.

Common adjective-forming suffixes include -ful, -less, -ous, -y, -able, -ive, and -al, each contributing distinct semantic functions (Plag, 2018b). For example, the suffix -ful generally expresses possession of a quality (e.g., painful, hopeful), while -less indicates absence or lack (e.g., helpless, lifeless). Suffixation simultaneously alters grammatical category and enriches semantic meaning, making it a central mechanism of English word formation. Recent studies on literary reading have further demonstrated that linguistic foregrounding and stylistic features influence readers' emotional engagement and interpretation of literary texts, reinforcing the role of linguistic form in meaning construction (Scapin et al., 2023; Fernandez-Quintanilla & Stradling, 2023)

2.2 Adjectives in Literary Texts

In literary discourse, adjectives construct atmosphere, characterization, and psychological depth, making them central to stylistic analysis. Adjectives are commonly classified into qualitative and relational types. Qualitative adjectives convey evaluative or emotional qualities, while relational adjectives denote classification or association, both shaping narrative interpretation (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005). Qualitative adjectives are particularly dominant in literary narratives because they strengthen descriptive and emotional expressions.

Lexical and grammatical choices guide readers' interpretation of characters, emotions, and situations within a narrative (Leech & Short, 2007). In this context, adjective suffixation becomes an important linguistic feature because it supports emotional expression and psychological representation in literary discourse. Recent stylistic studies have increasingly shown that derivational morphology operates not merely as a grammatical mechanism but as a meaning-making tool in literary language (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010; Nørgaard et al., 2010; Verdonk, 2002).

2.3 Stylistic Meaning and Morphology

Stylistic meaning refers to the layer of meaning encoded in language choices that goes beyond referential or denotative content to convey social, affective, and evaluative dimensions (Crystal & Davy, 1969; Leech, 1974). In literary texts, stylistic meaning is often created through specific lexical and grammatical choices that foreground particular aspects of experience or emotion. Leech (1974) identifies seven types of meaning, of which stylistic or connotative meaning is central to literary analysis because it reflects the writer's intentional or habitual use of linguistic forms to achieve specific effects.

In the context of adjective-forming suffixation, stylistic meaning is realized through the selection and frequency of certain suffixes that carry affective values. For instance,

adjectives formed with -less (helpless, lifeless, powerless) carry connotations of deprivation, vulnerability, and existential emptiness. Similarly, -ful adjectives (painful, pitiful, hopeful) often encode heightened emotional states. Simpson (2004) argues that the stylistic dimension of language in fiction is closely tied to the patterns of foregrounding, in which certain linguistic choices stand out against the norm and draw attention to themselves as meaning-making devices.

From a functional linguistic perspective, Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) explain that lexical and grammatical choices construct ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. When applied to literary texts, this framework helps explain how morphological patterns such as adjective suffixation contribute to the overall emotional and thematic texture of a narrative. In *The Metamorphosis*, the stylistic meaning of derived adjectives is inseparable from Kafka's representation of alienation, psychological disintegration, and social isolation. The repeated occurrence of emotionally loaded adjectives throughout the narrative creates a cumulative stylistic effect that reinforces the novel's dominant themes. Recent stylistic research has further emphasized that readers' responses to literary texts are strongly influenced by recurrent linguistic patterns, which contribute to emotional engagement and narrative interpretation (Scapin et al., 2023).

Several recent studies have explored the stylistic functions of morphological choices in literary texts. Research on derivational suffixes in novels and fairy tales has shown that affixation contributes not only to lexical formation but also to characterization, descriptive richness, and the construction of narrative meaning (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2024; Lastari & Winarta, 2025). These findings suggest that morphological analysis should incorporate a stylistic perspective to better explain how linguistic forms contribute to literary interpretation.

2.4 Previous Studies and Research Gap

Plag (2018) and Haspelmath & Sims (2013) have extensively documented derivational morphology in general English language use. However, their focus remains on structural and grammatical dimensions rather than on literary or stylistic functions. Similarly, earlier studies such as those by Bauer (2003) and Lieber (2004) provide foundational accounts of suffixation but do not address its role in literary discourse.

Recent research has increasingly examined derivational morphology in literary discourse, highlighting the contribution of affixation to characterization, descriptive richness, and meaning construction in literary narratives (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2024; Lastari & Winarta, 2025). More recently, research on literary morphology has shown that derivational affixes play an important role in shaping characterization, enriching emotional expression, and enhancing stylistic features in literary works (Yuliana & Putra, 2024; Lastari & Winarta, 2025; Lumintang & Winarta, 2025). Furthermore, studies on adjective-forming derivational suffixes have demonstrated that morphological choices contribute to descriptive meaning, characterization, and thematic development within literary narratives (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2024). Despite these advances, few studies have analyzed adjective suffixation in canonical literary texts such as Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, and fewer still have integrated stylistic meaning as a central analytical dimension. Moreover, most previous studies have concentrated on identifying and classifying derivational affixes, while relatively little attention has been paid to how adjective-forming suffixes contribute to psychological representation and stylistic meaning in canonical literary works. This study addresses that gap by combining morphological analysis with stylistic interpretation.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018), appropriate for analyzing linguistic forms in narrative context rather than quantifying frequency alone. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to interpret morphological phenomena within their literary and stylistic context, examining not only the forms of adjective-forming suffixes but also their contributions to meaning construction, psychological representation, and narrative atmosphere. This design is consistent with approaches used in literary linguistics and stylistics research, in which close textual analysis is prioritized over statistical measurement. Qualitative description was considered appropriate because the study sought to provide a detailed account of morphological patterns and their stylistic functions within a literary text without attempting to test causal relationships or statistical generalizations.

3.2 Data Source and Sampling

The data source is Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka, 2005), a canonical work of literary modernism widely recognized for its psychologically intense and descriptively rich language. The novel is divided into three chapters, each representing a distinct stage of narrative development: Chapter 1 functions as the exposition, presenting Gregor Samsa's transformation and initial psychological shock; Chapter 2 serves as the rising action and development, depicting the family's gradual estrangement; and Chapter 3 constitutes the climax and resolution, culminating in Gregor's death and the family's liberation. Since the study examined all three chapters of the novel, total sampling was employed. All occurrences of adjective-forming suffixes identified in the text were included in the analysis to ensure comprehensive coverage of morphological patterns across the entire narrative.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted through systematic close reading and note-taking guided by an observation sheet to ensure consistency. A structured observation sheet was used to record each occurrence of adjective-forming suffixation, including the derived form, base form, suffix type, semantic category, and narrative context. This procedure follows document analysis principles commonly employed in qualitative textual research (Bowen, 2009). The procedure involved the following steps: (1) all words containing adjective-forming suffixes such as *-ful*, *-less*, *-ous*, *-y*, *-able*, *-ent*, *-ive*, *-ly*, and *-al* were identified through close reading (Katamba, 2018); (2) loanwords and inflected forms were excluded to maintain focus on derivational morphology; (3) the identified words were categorized based on the type of suffix they contain; (4) the morphological process of each derived adjective was analyzed by identifying the base form and the attached suffix; (5) the derived adjectives were classified into qualitative (evaluative/emotional) and relational (associative/classificatory) categories following Huddleston and Pullum (2005); and (6) the stylistic meaning of the derived adjectives was interpreted in relation to their narrative context, drawing on Leech's (1974) framework of stylistic meaning and Simpson's (2004) theory of foregrounding in literary discourse.

Data analysis proceeded through three interpretive stages: morphological identification, semantic categorization, and stylistic interpretation. First, each derived adjective was analyzed to identify its base form and derivational suffix. Second, the adjectives were categorized according to their semantic and grammatical functions. Third, their stylistic meanings were interpreted within the narrative context by drawing on Leech's

(1974) theory of stylistic meaning, Simpson's (2004) concept of foregrounding, and Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) functional perspective on meaning-making. The analytical process followed the interactive model of qualitative data analysis involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This triangulated approach ensured that findings were grounded in both structural and stylistic dimensions of the text.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The analysis identified a total of 73 valid instances of adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis*, collected from all three chapters after excluding inflectional forms (e.g., superlative -est) and lexicalized forms that did not meet the criteria of productive derivational morphology. Following morphological verification based on established frameworks of derivational morphology, the identified adjectives were categorized according to their morphological structures and semantic functions.

The distribution of adjective-forming suffixes across the novel demonstrates an uneven pattern. Chapter 1 contains 18 instances (24.66%), Chapter 2 contains 17 instances (23.29%), and Chapter 3 contains 38 instances (52.05%). The substantial increase in Chapter 3 indicates that adjectival derivation becomes more prominent as the narrative progresses. This tendency corresponds to the intensification of emotional conflict, social alienation, and psychological deterioration experienced by Gregor Samsa during the final stage of the story. The greater frequency of derived adjectives in the concluding chapter suggests that Kafka increasingly relies on descriptive language to portray emotional states, interpersonal tensions, and evaluative judgments. Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of adjective-forming suffixes identified in the corpus.

Table 1.
Frequency of Adjective-Forming Suffixes

Suffix	Frequency	Data	Percentage (%)
-ful	13	pitiful, peaceful (2), careful (3), painful (3), beautiful, useful, helpful, hopeful	17.81%
-al	8	personal, normal, musical, cultural, logical, accidental, national, professional	10.96%
-y	7	hungry (2), dirty, dusty, cloudy, healthy, easy	9.59%
-less	6	helpless, lifeless, powerless, hopeless, useless, peerless	8.22%
-ous	5	anxious, curious, dangerous, famous, nervous	6.85%
-able	5	comfortable (2), suitable, moveable, changeable	6.85%
-ent	5	different (3), permanent, dependent	6.85%
-ive	4	sensitive, effective, attractive, creative	5.48%
-ly	4	Friendly (2), lovely (2)	5.48%
-ic	4	electric, economic, artistic, poetic	5.48%
-ible	3	Horrible (2), terrible,	4.11%
-ary	2	necessary, ordinary	2.74%
-ish	2	childish, foolish	2.74%
-ar	1	particular	1.37%
-en	1	Rotten	1.37%
-ant	1	Resistant	1.37%
-ical	1	Historical	1.37%
-ific	1	Scientific	1.37%
Total	73		100%

The data reveal that the suffix *-ful* is the most productive adjective-forming suffix in the corpus, accounting for 13 occurrences (17.81%). Examples such as *pitiful*, *peaceful*, *careful*, and *painful* indicate that this suffix primarily contributes evaluative and emotional meanings. Morphologically, *-ful* attaches predominantly to nominal bases to express possession or abundance of a particular quality. The frequent occurrence of words such as *painful* and *pitiful* reflects the thematic centrality of suffering, sympathy, and emotional distress in the novel. This finding suggests that adjectival derivation through *-ful* functions as an important linguistic resource for expressing the psychological dimensions of Kafka's narrative.

The second most frequent suffix is *-al* with eight occurrences (10.96%). Adjectives such as *personal*, *cultural*, *logical*, and *professional* are relational adjectives derived from nouns. Unlike qualitative adjectives that express subjective evaluations, these forms establish conceptual, institutional, or social relationships. Their presence indicates Kafka's attention to social structures and familial roles that influence Gregor's identity. The occurrence of relational adjectives reinforces the broader themes of social obligation and family responsibility embedded in the narrative.

The suffix *-y* appears seven times (9.59%), producing adjectives such as *hungry*, *dirty*, *dusty*, and *cloudy*. These adjectives typically describe physical conditions, sensory perceptions, or environmental states. Their use contributes to the vivid depiction of Gregor's deteriorating living conditions and bodily transformation. Semantically, the suffix *-y* often denotes the presence of a particular characteristic, thereby enhancing the descriptive quality of the narrative.

The suffix *-less*, occurring six times (8.22%), represents a particularly significant pattern. Examples such as *helpless*, *lifeless*, *powerless*, *hopeless*, and *useless* express absence, deprivation, or lack of desirable qualities. The concentration of these negatively marked adjectives aligns closely with the themes of alienation and existential despair that characterize *The Metamorphosis*. The repeated use of *-less* derivatives reflects Gregor's progressive loss of agency, social value, and human identity. From a semantic perspective, this suffix serves as a powerful linguistic marker of negation and deficiency, reinforcing the tragic atmosphere of the novel.

Similarly, the suffix *-ous* occurs five times (6.85%), generating adjectives such as *anxious*, *curious*, *dangerous*, *famous*, and *nervous*. These forms predominantly express emotional, psychological, or evaluative states. The occurrence of *anxious* and *nervous* is particularly noteworthy because these adjectives directly relate to the emotional instability experienced by Gregor and his family. The suffix therefore contributes to the representation of psychological tension throughout the narrative.

Other moderately productive suffixes include *-able*, *-ent*, *-ive*, *-ly*, and *-ic*, each contributing between four and five occurrences. Adjectives such as *comfortable*, *suitable*, *dependent*, *sensitive*, *effective*, *friendly*, and *artistic* demonstrate the diversity of derivational processes employed in the text. These suffixes expand the descriptive repertoire of the narrative by expressing possibility (*-able*), states or conditions (*-ent*), qualities or tendencies (*-ive*), personal characteristics (*-ly*), and categorical relations (*-ic*).

Less frequent suffixes, including *-ible*, *-ary*, *-ish*, *-ar*, *-en*, *-ant*, *-ical*, and *-ific*, occur only occasionally. Although their numerical contribution is relatively small, they demonstrate the morphological richness of English adjective formation. Examples such as *horrible*, *necessary*, *foolish*, *particular*, *rotten*, and *historical* illustrate the variety of derivational patterns available in English and utilized within Kafka's translated text.

From a semantic perspective, the findings indicate that qualitative adjectives significantly outnumber relational adjectives. Most of the identified adjectives describe emotions, psychological states, physical conditions, or evaluative qualities rather than merely establishing relationships between entities. This predominance reflects Kafka's narrative focus on the subjective experiences of Gregor Samsa and the emotional reactions of those around him. The high frequency of adjectives expressing pain, helplessness, anxiety, and deterioration supports the interpretation that emotional and psychological characterization constitutes a central stylistic feature of the novel.

Taken as a whole, the results demonstrate that adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* serves not merely as a grammatical process but also as a significant stylistic and semantic device. The predominance of suffixes such as -ful, -less, and -ous highlights the novel's emphasis on emotional intensity, psychological conflict, and existential suffering. Consequently, derivational morphology contributes substantially to the construction of meaning and characterization, revealing how linguistic form interacts with literary themes to shape readers' understanding of the narrative.

4.2 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that adjective-forming suffixation in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* follows systematic and productive morphological patterns that contribute not only to lexical expansion but also to the construction of narrative meaning. The identification of eighteen adjective-forming suffixes, with a total of 73 valid occurrences, confirms the central role of suffixation as one of the most productive derivational processes in English morphology (Katamba, 2018; Plag, 2018). The data reveal that most adjectives are derived from nominal bases, such as pity → pitiful, danger → dangerous, and culture → cultural, while a smaller number are derived from verbal bases, including use → useful, change → changeable, and attract → attractive. This pattern supports previous morphological studies arguing that derivational suffixes serve as effective mechanisms for transforming lexical categories while simultaneously extending semantic meaning (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011; Bauer, 2003).

From a morphological perspective, the findings provide empirical evidence for the category-changing function of derivational suffixation. The formation of adjectives from nouns and verbs illustrates how suffixes systematically alter the grammatical status of lexical items while preserving a semantic relationship with their base forms. For example, the transformation of danger into dangerous and attract into attractive demonstrates how derivation creates new lexical items that express qualities, attributes, or states associated with the original roots. This finding aligns with Matthews (1991) view that derivational morphology constitutes a productive process through which languages expand their lexical inventories and increase semantic precision.

However, the significance of adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* extends beyond grammatical transformation. In literary discourse, morphological choices contribute to stylistic effects and influence readers' interpretation of characters, events, and themes (Lieber, 2004). The predominance of qualitative adjectives throughout the corpus suggests that Kafka relies heavily on evaluative and descriptive language to portray emotional experiences, physical conditions, and psychological states. According to Biber et al. (1999) and Quirk et al. (1985), adjectives function as essential descriptive resources in written discourse because they enrich textual representation and facilitate detailed

characterization. The present findings support this argument, as qualitative adjectives substantially outnumber relational adjectives in the dataset.

The dominance of the suffix *-ful* (13 occurrences; 17.81%) is particularly significant. Adjectives such as *pitiful*, *painful*, *careful*, and *hopeful* encode emotional and evaluative meanings that contribute directly to the portrayal of Gregor Samsa's psychological condition. Semantically, the suffix *-ful* denotes the presence or abundance of a particular quality, enabling the narrative to emphasize feelings of suffering, sympathy, expectation, and vulnerability. The frequent occurrence of these forms suggests that emotional evaluation constitutes a central stylistic feature of the novel. In this regard, adjective derivation serves as a linguistic mechanism through which Kafka intensifies the reader's emotional engagement with Gregor's experiences.

The relatively high frequency of the suffix *-al* (8 occurrences; 10.96%) also merits attention. Unlike *-ful* adjectives, which primarily express subjective qualities, *-al* adjectives such as *personal*, *cultural*, *professional*, and *national* function as relational markers that connect individuals to broader social, institutional, and cultural frameworks. Their presence reflects the social dimensions of Gregor's identity as a worker, son, and provider. These relational adjectives help construct the external world against which Gregor's transformation unfolds, highlighting the tension between individual subjectivity and social expectations. Consequently, the use of *-al* adjectives contributes to the novel's critique of modern social structures and the pressures imposed upon individuals.

Similarly, the suffix *-y* (7 occurrences; 9.59%) plays an important descriptive role. Adjectives such as *hungry*, *dirty*, *dusty*, and *cloudy* evoke sensory perceptions and physical conditions that characterize Gregor's deteriorating environment. These forms reinforce the material and bodily dimensions of the narrative, providing vivid imagery that reflects Gregor's gradual separation from human society. The prevalence of *-y* adjectives suggests that Kafka's language systematically links physical decay with psychological decline, thereby strengthening the symbolic relationship between Gregor's transformed body and his increasing social isolation.

Particularly noteworthy is the occurrence of *-less* adjectives (6 occurrences; 8.22%), including *helpless*, *lifeless*, *powerless*, *hopeless*, and *useless*. Semantically, the suffix *-less* expresses absence, deprivation, or lack, making it one of the most negatively marked derivational patterns in the dataset. The repeated appearance of these forms reflects the progressive erosion of Gregor's agency, social value, and human identity. Their concentration within the narrative supports interpretations of *The Metamorphosis* as a literary exploration of alienation, dehumanization, and existential despair. Therefore, the productivity of *-less* adjectives is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a stylistic strategy that reinforces the novel's dominant themes.

The findings further indicate that suffixes such as *-ous*, *-able*, *-ent*, *-ive*, and *-ly* contribute to the representation of emotional states and personal attributes. Adjectives such as *anxious*, *nervous*, *sensitive*, and *dependent* frequently describe psychological conditions, while forms such as *comfortable* and *suitable* characterize situational circumstances. Collectively, these derivations enrich the narrative's descriptive texture and enable nuanced portrayals of characters and events. The diversity of suffix types demonstrates the flexibility of English derivational morphology in generating adjectives that express a broad range of semantic functions.

The present study also contributes to the growing body of research on derivational morphology in literary texts. Previous studies by Meilandari et al. (2022), Karang et al.

(2024), and Lastari & Winarta (2025) demonstrated that derivational suffixes contribute to characterization, thematic development, and descriptive richness in literary works. The current findings corroborate these studies by showing that adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* performs similar functions. Nevertheless, this study extends earlier research by integrating quantitative morphological analysis with stylistic interpretation. Rather than merely identifying and classifying suffixes, the analysis demonstrates how specific suffix types and their frequencies are systematically connected to narrative themes, emotional atmosphere, and characterization.

Overall, the findings reveal that adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* operates simultaneously at morphological, semantic, and stylistic levels. The predominance of suffixes such as -ful, -al, -y, and -less reflects Kafka's reliance on derived adjectives to construct emotional intensity, depict physical deterioration, and critique social structures. Consequently, derivational morphology emerges not merely as a linguistic process but as an integral component of literary meaning-making, contributing significantly to the novel's representation of alienation, psychological suffering, and dehumanization.

4.3 Discussion: Stylistic Meaning of Derived Adjectives

Beyond their grammatical and morphological functions, the derived adjectives identified in the corpus perform significant stylistic roles that contribute to the thematic and psychological complexity of *The Metamorphosis*. Stylistic analysis suggests that the distribution of adjective-forming suffixes is not arbitrary; rather, it reflects a systematic linguistic pattern through which Kafka constructs emotional atmosphere, character psychology, and thematic development. The frequency data reveal that the most productive suffixes -ful (13 instances), -al (8 instances), -y (7 instances), and -less (6 instances) collectively account for nearly half of all identified adjective formations, indicating their central role in shaping the novel's stylistic profile.

A notable finding is the relationship between suffix frequency and thematic representation. The predominance of -ful adjectives contributes to the expression of emotional intensity and subjective evaluation. Words such as pitiful and painful encourage readers to interpret Gregor's condition through an affective lens, reinforcing themes of suffering and vulnerability. In contrast, -less adjectives systematically foreground absence and deprivation, emphasizing Gregor's loss of agency, social recognition, and human dignity. The coexistence of these two highly expressive suffixes creates a linguistic contrast between emotional presence (-ful) and existential absence (-less), a contrast that mirrors the tension between Gregor's inner humanity and his increasingly dehumanized social existence.

The stylistic significance of adjective derivation becomes even more apparent when examined in relation to narrative progression. While Chapters 1 and 2 contain relatively similar frequencies of adjective-forming suffixes (18 and 17 instances respectively), Chapter 3 contains 38 instances, accounting for more than half of the total dataset. This sharp increase suggests a deliberate intensification of descriptive language as the narrative approaches its climax. The greater density of derived adjectives in the final chapter reflects the increasing complexity of emotional conflict, family tension, and psychological deterioration. As Gregor becomes progressively isolated from his family and society, the narrative correspondingly employs a richer network of evaluative and descriptive adjectives to articulate this process.

Particularly significant is the concentration of negatively marked adjectives in the final chapter. Forms such as helpless, lifeless, powerless, and hopeless appear at crucial

moments in the narrative, coinciding with Gregor's physical decline and eventual death. Their semantic association with absence and loss reinforces the novel's exploration of alienation and dehumanization. This pattern supports (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010) argument that recurring linguistic features often function as stylistic signals that guide readers toward particular thematic interpretations. In the case of *The Metamorphosis*, the increasing use of negatively evaluated derived adjectives contributes to a cumulative stylistic effect that intensifies the sense of despair and social exclusion.

Furthermore, the coexistence of qualitative and relational adjectives enhances the multidimensional characterization of Gregor. Qualitative adjectives predominantly depict emotional states, physical conditions, and evaluative judgments, whereas relational adjectives situate Gregor within broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts. This interaction between subjective and contextual description reflects one of the central tensions of the novel: the conflict between personal identity and social expectations. Through the strategic use of adjective-forming suffixation, Kafka simultaneously represents Gregor's inner psychological world and the external social structures that contribute to his marginalization.

From a stylistic perspective, therefore, adjective-forming suffixation functions as more than a process of lexical creation. It serves as a linguistic resource through which emotional intensity, thematic development, and characterization are systematically constructed. The findings demonstrate that the distribution and semantic properties of derived adjectives are closely aligned with the novel's dominant concerns, particularly alienation, identity loss, and dehumanization. Consequently, the study provides further evidence that morphological patterns can play a crucial role in literary meaning-making and that derivational morphology constitutes an important analytical lens for understanding the relationship between linguistic form and literary interpretation.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated adjective-forming suffixation in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* from a derivational morphological perspective and explored its stylistic significance within the narrative. The analysis identified 73 valid instances of adjective-forming suffixes distributed across eighteen suffix types, with -ful, -al, -y, and -less emerging as the most productive patterns. These findings confirm that suffixation constitutes a highly productive word-formation process in English, enabling the derivation of adjectives from nominal and verbal bases while simultaneously generating new semantic and grammatical functions.

The study further demonstrates that adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* serves purposes beyond lexical and grammatical transformation. The predominance of qualitative adjectives indicates Kafka's reliance on descriptive and evaluative language to portray emotional states, psychological conditions, and physical deterioration. In particular, the frequent occurrence of -ful adjectives contributes to the expression of suffering, vulnerability, and emotional intensity, whereas -less adjectives foreground themes of absence, loss, and powerlessness. Similarly, -y adjectives enhance sensory and environmental description, while -al adjectives situate characters within broader social and institutional contexts. Together, these morphological patterns contribute to the construction of characterization, atmosphere, and thematic meaning throughout the novel.

The distribution of adjective-forming suffixes across the three chapters also reveals a meaningful stylistic pattern. The substantial increase in derived adjectives in Chapter 3 corresponds to the climax of Gregor Samsa's psychological decline and social isolation, suggesting that morphological choices are closely aligned with narrative development. This finding demonstrates that derivational morphology functions not merely as a structural linguistic process but also as a stylistic resource that reinforces the novel's central themes of alienation, dehumanization, identity loss, and existential suffering.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of derivational morphology by illustrating how morphological analysis can be integrated with stylistic interpretation in literary studies. Unlike previous research that primarily focused on identifying and classifying derivational suffixes, the present study demonstrates that the frequency, distribution, and semantic functions of adjective-forming suffixes can reveal important aspects of literary meaning and narrative construction. The findings therefore support the view that morphological patterns constitute a significant component of literary style and can provide valuable insights into the relationship between linguistic form and thematic representation.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited to adjective-forming suffixation in a single literary work. Future research may expand the scope by examining other derivational processes, such as noun-forming and verb-forming suffixes, or by conducting comparative analyses across different literary texts, authors, genres, or translations. Such investigations would further enhance our understanding of the role of morphology in literary discourse and contribute to the growing intersection between linguistic analysis and literary criticism.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express sincere appreciation to the lecturers for the guidance and constructive suggestions provided throughout this study. Gratitude is also extended to all parties who contributed directly and indirectly to this research. The authors acknowledge the academic institution for the support and opportunity provided in conducting this study.

References

- Aronoff, M., & Fudeman, K. (2011). *What is morphology?* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Baayen, R. H., Milin, P., Đurđević, D. F., Hendrix, P., & Marelli, M. (2019). An amorphous model for morphological processing in visual comprehension based on naive discriminative learning. *Psychological Review*, 126(6), 825–859. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000151>
- Bauer, L. (2003). *Introducing linguistic morphology* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
- Bauer, L., Lieber, R., & Plag, I. (2013). *The Oxford reference guide to English morphology*. Oxford University Press.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. Pearson Education.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Crystal, D. (2018). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D., & Davy, D. (1969). *Investigating English style*. Longman.

- Fernandez-Quintanilla, C., & Stradling, F. (2023). Introduction: Stylistic approaches to narrative empathy. *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 52(2), 103–121. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jls-2023-2008>
- Günther, F., & Marelli, M. (2020). Trying to make it work: Compositional effects in the processing of compound “nonwords.” *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 73(7), 1082–1091. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1747021820902019>
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday’s introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Haspelmath, M., & Sims, A. D. (2013). *Understanding morphology* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2005). *A student’s introduction to English grammar*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jeffries, L., & McIntyre, D. (2010). *Stylistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kafka, F. (2005). *The metamorphosis* (T. D. Wyllie, Ed.). Project Gutenberg. <https://www.gutenberg.org>
- Karang, N. P. D. N. P., Artawa, K., & Malini, N. L. N. S. (2024). Derivational suffixes forming adjectives and their syntactic functions in reference to Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 4(2), 330–345. <https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v4i2.1897>
- Katamba, F. (2018). *Morphology* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Lastari, N. K. K., & Winarta, I. B. G. N. (2025). A linguistic analysis of derivational suffixes in short story entitled “The Nightingale and the Rose” by Oscar Wilde. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v13i2.7308>
- Leech, G. N. (1974). *Semantics: The study of meaning*. Penguin Books.
- Leech, G. N., & Short, M. (2007). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Lieber, R. (2004). *Morphology and lexical semantics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lieber, R. (2010). *Introducing morphology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lumintang, K., & Winarta, I. B. G. N. (2025). Analysis of prefixes in the novel *Always Forever Maybe*. *Elysian Journal: English Literature, Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 5(3). <https://doi.org/10.36733/elysian.v5i3.12302>
- Matthews, P. H. (1991). *Morphology* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Meilandari, N. M. V., Putra, I. G. B. W. N., & Sulatra, I. K. (2022). The functions of derivational suffixes in the novel *The Little Prince* written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. *Elysian Journal: English Literature, Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 2(3), 238–246. <https://doi.org/10.36733/elysian.v2i3.3602>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Nørgaard, N., Busse, B., & Montoro, R. (2010). *Key terms in stylistics*. Continuum.
- Plag, I. (2018). *Word-formation in English* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. Longman.
- Scapin, G., Loi, C., Hakemulder, F., Bálint, K., & Konijn, E. A. (2023). The role of processing foregrounding in empathic reactions in literary reading. *Discourse Processes*, 60(4–5), 273–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163853X.2023.2198813>

- Schmidtke, D., Gagné, C. L., Kuperman, V., & Spalding, T. L. (2018). The role of derivational morphology in visual word recognition. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 44(8), 1283–1303. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xlm0000519>
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. Routledge.
- Toolan, M. (1998). *Language in literature: An introduction to stylistics*. Arnold.
- Verdonk, P. (2002). *Stylistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Yule, G. (2014). *The study of language* (5th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Yuliana, P. R., & Putra, I. G. B. W. N. (2024). Derivational affixes found in *Ride Your Wave* novel. *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai*, 8(1), 11461–11469. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jptam.v8i1.14105>