

On the representation of sublexical units in a morphology without morphemes

One of the most promising evolutions in current morphological research is represented by the emergence of so-called ‘realizational’ models (Stump 2001, ch. 1). In such models, complex (derived or inflected) words are not analyzed as constructed by the juxtaposition of smaller meaningful units. Rather, the semantic and morphosyntactic properties are carried by the word form as a whole, and not by some of its subparts and their combination. Consequently, in these models, the priority is not given to the decomposition of complex forms, but to the relationships among forms in the lexicon (Blevins 2006).

In the present paper, I will propose an analysis of several derivational phenomena in some different languages, in order to show that traditional morphemes (or their evolutions) are not the best tool for the study of derivational morphology. Two opposite conceptions of morphology view the units linked with the expression of morphological relations (suffixes, prefixes, etc.) as, respectively, linguistic signs (objects stored in memory along with lexemes, cf. e.g. Lieber 1992) or as the exponents of morphological processes, with no autonomous existence outside of this function (cf. Janda 1983, Zwicky 1985, 1995, among others). A consequence of this dereification of morphemes is that the identification of a unique phonological representation for sublexical units is no more an issue, and in fact it has no real theoretical or empirical motivation, whereas it is a priority for those models that consider morphemes as signs. Note that this view is consistent with the view, expressed in several recent works in realizational morphology, that the identification of a unique (base) form is not an issue for lexemes, not even for the regular ones (cf. Blevins 2006; Montermini & Boyé forthcoming).

What I will propose is to consider that the traditional derivational ‘morphemes’ are not to be viewed as objects, but as constraints on the phonological form of the output, interacting with other phonological, morphological and lexical constraints. Some recent studies in Optimality Theory have proposed, similarly, a mechanism of hierarchisation of affixal allomorphs (cf. Bonet *et al.* 2007).

In the talk, I will consider data from different languages for which a constraint-based analysis seems particularly appropriate. These include in particular cases of affixal allomorphy such as:

- deverbal action nouns with the suffix *-(z)ione* in Italian. In this case the affix has an invariant final part ([jone]) that can be preceded by a limited number of phonemes, giving raise to 20 different variants. The final form of the derivate is determined by the interaction between the form of the verbal stem on which it is formed (in most cases, the past participle) and the form of the affix;
- relational adjectives and ethnics in *-iano* (cf. *iraniano* ‘Iranian’ vs. *coreano* ‘Korean’) in Italian and the corresponding French forms in *-ien*;
- diminutives in *-ino* in Italian (cf. *telefonino* ‘mobile phone’ vs. *palloncino* ‘small ball’);
- diminutives and hypocoristics in Russian (cf. *Marija* → *Maša* vs. *Katja* → *Katjuša*), in which we observe an interaction between allomorphy and the prosodic structure of the derivate.

In the last part of the talk I will suggest that other phenomena, such as, for instance, unfaithful reduplication or cases of frequent affix combinations may be well accounted for by considering the phonological form of derived words as the result of constraint interaction, including constraints on their output form, rather than the result of the concatenation of morphemic or morpheme-like units. An explanation of this kind may also be invoked for the cases of mutual potentiation of morphological elements observed for instance in English relational adjectives, where *-ic* is the preferred variant of the suffix, apart for bases ending in *-olog-*, that largely prefer the variant *-ical* (cf. Lindsay & Aronoff 2010).

References

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