French corpus data in favor of Construction Morphology

In this talk it is shown that various corpus data argue for a clear-cut distinction between entirely regular, transparent morphological structures on the one hand and more marginal irregular and semi-regular ones on the other. It is argued that any morphological theory has to account for this categorical distinction as well as for the gradient effects of morphology, and that Construction Morphology is extremely well suited in this respect since in this framework (regular) morphological schemas are conceived of as out-put oriented abstractions from concrete cases of morphologically complex derivatives with similar properties.

One important aspect concerning the morphological competence of native speakers is that morphological structure is inherently gradient, as evidenced by various psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic investigations (cf. e.g. Hay & Baayen 2005). One example is Hay (2003) showing that English *–ly* derivatives which are more frequent than their bases, as e.g. *swiftly* exhibit a higher degree of 't-deletion' than *–ly* derivatives which are less frequent than their bases, as e.g. *softly*. Such gradient effects are not only reported for patterns traditionally called 'morphemes'. The gradience of morphological structures is also revealed by studies indicating the psychological reality of phonaesthemes like English *gl-* in *glitter, glow, glare*, and so on. For example, in a recent priming experiment based on the lexical decision task, Bergen (2004: 299) found out that „targets are responded to much more quickly when they share a phonaestheme with their prime than when they share form, meaning, both, or nothing with it". According to Bergen (2004), Bybee (2007) and others, the effects of gradient morphology may best be modeled in an emergentist framework in which one conceives of morphological structure as gradually emerging from recurrent patterns showing up in the entirety of the lexical items stored or processed by the corresponding speakers.

On the contrary, there are various studies indicating that there is a clear-cut distinction between associatively processed irregular and semi-regular patterns on the one hand and entirely regular rule- or schema-governed patterns on the other hand. As a case in point, we will present, among other things, a synchronic study of French *–ion* nominalizations based on a 3.000.000 word corpus extracted from FRANTEXT and on several Latin databases as e.g. PERSEUS revealing that out of the 540 regular *–ation* derivatives contained in the corpus at least 161 types (30 %) were genuinely French, that is, without any attested Latin equivalent, whereas the irregular or semi-regular *–ion* nominalizations without Latin equivalent only amount to 3 out of 352 Types. However, the most interesting point is that, contrary to the regular *–ation* forms, the 3 genuinely French irregular derivatives are all derived from French past participles (cf. e.g. *éclosion* 'blooming' < *éclos* ('bloomed', p.ptc. of *éclore* 'to bloom'), indicating that these forms (and only these!) are coined by true analogy with the corresponding Latinate forms (which once were equally derived from past participle forms).

Based on such pieces of evidence it is argued that next to the gradience of morphological structure and the intimate relation between concrete examples and abstract rules or schemas, any morphological theory has to account for the clear-cut categorical distinction between semi- or irregular patterns and entirely regular ones, the latter becoming evident at the latest by analyzing the genuine, i.e. non-borrowed derivatives of a given language. Furthermore, it is argued that the framework of Construction Morphology as designed by Booij (2010; 2007; 2005) is an appropriate way to capture this complex bundle of phenomena related to the morphological competence of the native speakers since this framework "avoids (…) the unwarranted assumption that linguistic constructs are either generated by rule or listed, and that being listed excludes a linguistic construct from being linked to a rule at the same time" (Booij 2010: 4) by conceiving of morphological constructions as (out-put oriented) abstractions from concrete cases of morphologically complex derivatives with similar properties that do not only express generalizations about the form and meaning of existing derivatives but may also be used as the "starting point" (ibd.: 2) for new derivatives.

Corpora

FRANTEXT: Combettes, Bernard & Pierrel, Jean-Marie (2009). FRANTEXT, 16th to 21st century, Nancy: CNRS/Université Nancy 2. (http://www.atilf.fr/frantext.htm, 17.10.2010)

PERSEUS: Crane, Grebory R., ed. (2009). Perseus Digital Library. Online Latin Text Corpus. Medford, MA: Tufts University. (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper, 17.10.2010)

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Bybee, Joan (2007). *Frequency of Use and the Organization of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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