

Li8: Morphology/Michaelmas 2017

Introduction to linguistic morphology

Jim Blevins (jpb39)
M11-12 / LB9 / 09-10

Linguistic morphology

- ❖ What is linguistic morphology?
- ❖ What form variation is distinctively morphological?
- ❖ How do morphological variants form larger patterns and systems, and what types of principles govern their organization and development?

Morphological variation

- ❖ What is the extent/nature of morphological variation?
- ❖ Does this variation differ qualitatively from variation in other domains, and if so, how?
- ❖ What techniques are available for measuring variation and what, if anything, can these measures tell us about 'morphological complexity'?
- ❖ What are the implications of variation for acquisition?

Theories and tools

- ❖ What insights can theories and models contribute?
- ❖ What tools and methods are suitable for morphological description and analysis?
- ❖ What is the relation between linguistic analyses of morphological phenomena and models of processing and acquisition in the developmental sciences?

Morphology as the study of 'word structure'

- ❖ By the **morphology** of a language we mean the constructions in which bound forms appear among the constituents (Bloomfield 1933: 207)
- ❖ Morphology is the study of morphemes and their arrangements in forming words. (Nida 1949: 1)
- ❖ **morphology** deals with the internal structure of words and **syntax** with the rules governing their combination in sentences. (Lyons 1968: 194)
- ❖ 'Morphology', therefore, is simply a term for that branch of linguistics which is concerned with the 'forms of words' in different uses and constructions. (Matthews 1991: 3)

Form variation between the phoneme and phrase

- ❖ This conception places morphology between the sound system of a language (phonetics / phonology) and the combinatoric system of free forms (syntax / discourse):
 - ❖ Morphology is distinguished from phonetics / phonology by the fact that it assembles phonological units into larger meaningful units.
 - ❖ Morphology differs from syntax / discourse by the fact that morphological units in turn serve as components of larger phrases and sentences.

Morphology within a system of 'units' and 'levels'

- ❖ Conceptions of linguistic structure as a hierarchy of levels (or components) adopt a model of cascaded categorical contrasts.
- ❖ The simple units at each level are combined to form complex units that define the simple units at the immediately superordinate level.
- ❖ Units at each level encapsulate the variation relevant at that level.
- ❖ Processes at higher levels do not need to (and perhaps cannot) access differences internal to subordinate levels: phrases are characterized directly in terms of words, words in terms of morphs, morphs in terms of phonemes and phonemes in terms of phones.

The locus of hierarchies of units and levels

- ❖ Do categorical contrasts encapsulate relevant variation?
- ❖ Does a hierarchy of levels, with 'interfaces', provide an insightful factorization of languages?
- ❖ Or does this just assign an idealized discrete description to a continuous, multidimensional space of variation?
- ❖ Do the traditional notions 'word', 'meaning' and 'structure' provide a secure foundation for the study of form variation, or does their familiarity conceal challenges?

The status of morphological units, relations and systems

- ❖ This familiar conception rests on two key assumptions:
 - ❖ Factoring languages into units of differing sizes contributes to the analysis of patterns and regularities.
 - ❖ There is particular value in recognizing units intermediate in size between phonemes and phrases.
- ❖ This conception leaves open questions about the optimal size of morphological units and the types of relations or generalizations that are best stated in terms of these units.

Refurbishing our foundations

- ❖ Can we define morphological notions in ways that don't assume their usefulness and which allow for some form of external evaluation or validation?
 - ❖ What are morphological **alternations**?
 - ❖ What are morphological **patterns**?
 - ❖ What are morphological **systems**?
- ❖ How are these components organized? A morphological pattern is not just an inventory of alternations and a system is not just an inventory of patterns, but how are they related?

Morphological alternations

- ❖ What is a possible morphological alternation?
 - ❖ Any **discriminable** variation:
 - ❖ (i) in the composition (segmental or suprasegmental) of a word form, or
 - ❖ (ii) in the arrangement of (supra)segmental material.

Discriminability

- ❖ What determines discriminability?
 - ❖ Perceptual salience (also articulatory replicability).
- ❖ How do we measure or validate discriminability?
 - ❖ Computationally: discriminative learning models,
 - ❖ Experimentally: acoustic and psychoacoustic studies.

Morphology vs phonology

- ❖ What distinguishes a morphological alternation from a phonological alternation?
 - ❖ The **factor** that condition the alternation:
 - ❖ Phonological alternations are conditioned by phonological factors: the English plural marker is realized as [z] in *oxes* due to the phonological properties of the final segment of the stem.
 - ❖ Morphological alternations are conditioned by morphological factors: the English plural marker is realized as [en] in *oxen* due to the 'noun class' of OX.

The morphology-phonology DMZ

- ❖ But if any phonological alternation can be morphologized by a change in conditioning environment, what about cases that lie on the morphology-phonology border?
- ❖ What is the status of 'morphologically conditioned' phonological alternations?
- ❖ Does 'phonological opacity' reflect complex rule interactions or analogical pressures?
- ❖ How does the abstractness of phonological descriptions influence the boundary between phonology and morphology?

Morphology vs syntax

- ❖ There is also a range of phenomena that lie on the morphology-syntax border:
 - ❖ What is the status of periphrastic expressions (like the 'compound tense' expressions in English), or phrasal verbs and other multi-work expressions.
 - ❖ Are clitic sequences (like those found in Romance languages) syntactic, morphological, or somewhere in between?
 - ❖ What can we conclude from the fact that words that collocate strongly (like prepositional phrases) show the same priming behaviour as single words?