

September 23, 2005

CLASS 9: MORPHOLOGICAL PRODUCTIVITY

PRODUCTIVITY AND COMPETENCE

Observations:

1. *Though many things are possible in morphology, some are more possible than others.*
2. *Though there are infinitely many potential words in a language, some are more likely to become actual words than others.*

To say that a given morphological pattern is more **productive** than another is to say that there is a higher probability of a potential word in the first pattern being accepted in the language than there is of a potential word in the second pattern.

some key terms: *potential word* — *competence vs performance*

- (1) *A suffix is formally general if it always attaches to a category X and derives category Y.*

Example: *-ness* always **attaches to any adjective (A)** and yields an **abstract noun (N)** which is either in common use or would not be listed in a dictionary because its meaning is predictable.

*Example: *-ity* **attaches only to some adjectives** to yield an **abstract noun**.

*Example: *-th* **attaches to very few adjectives** to yield an **abstract noun**.

- (2) *A suffix is formally regular if it always attaches to a category X of a certain structure.*

Example: *-ness* can attach to **any adjective of any structure**.

Example: *-ity* can **attach to adjectives** of the structures *-ive, -able/ible, -al, -ar, -ic, -id, -ous*.

However, there are formally irregular forms (*density, *tensity, tension*).

*Example: *-th* can **attach to adjectives** of irregular, unpredictable structure.

- (3) *Formal regularity does not imply formal generality.* [for a reverse-like rule, see (4)]

Often the gaps found (**richity*) have **historical roots** (Latin *-ity* vs. Germanic *-ness*.)

Formal regularity does not always come in **syntactic varieties** (e.g. $A+af \rightarrow N$) or **morphological varieties** (depending on the form/structure of a base it attaches to), it can also be **phonologically conditioned** (such as V with final stress allows $-al_N$ as in $\rightarrow survival, *edital$ — exception: *burial*).

(4) *Formal generality presupposes formal regularity.* [in practice, not by definition]

But apart from this discussion, we can also identify *semantic regularity*:

(5) *A process is **semantically regular** if derived meaning is always uniform and consistent.*

Example: *-ly* always contributes the meaning ‘in an X fashion’ or ‘to an X degree’ (note that *-ly* is also formally regular: it attaches to A and yields Adv)

Unsurprisingly, formal and semantic regularity can **diverge**: consider the different contribution of *-ity* in *selectivity, locality, partiality, polarity* or *-able* in *readable, punishable*. Moreover, some morphologically clearly related words **vary** in terms of what types of derivational affixes, incl. stress, they allow (e.g. *admit, commit, permit, remit, transmit* and *-ion, -al, -ment, -ance*). The **converse** situation is arguably found in names for domestic animals in terms of sex and age.

The latter especially raises the question why there is no **cowlet* analogous to *piglet* — instead we have *calf* which **semantically blocks** the existence (or derivation) of *cowlet*:

(6) *If there is a word X specified for Y, then Y should be expressed by X and not be derived.*

While there might be exceptions, blocking of supplet forms is **absolute**.

Concerning productivity and structure, consider **negative prefixes** in English:

- (6) a. **non-Christian** ‘not Christian’
non-human ‘not human’
 b. **unchristian** ‘not behaving in a Christian manner’
inhuman ‘absence of human qualities’

- (7) a. **logical / contrary negator**: ‘not X’ ($\neg X$)
 b. **contradictory negator**: ‘opposite of X’

Types of productivity constraints:

- phonological constraints
- morphological constraints
- syntactic constraints
- semantic constraints

ignore: salience / testing productivity through positron emission tomography (PET)