

IDEAS FOR LINGUISTICS 105 PAPERS

The course outline passed out at the beginning of the class tells about the *structure* of the 105 paper. The discussion here is about the *content* of the paper.

This course has been fun just because it has allowed me to mess around learning about the morphology of a bunch of languages, and to me, morphology is the most fun of all the subfields of linguistics. Trying to figure out morphological puzzles is a lot more fun than video games or crossword puzzles, and a lot cheaper than playing Texas Hold 'Em. I would like everybody to have fun writing their morphology papers. THE MAIN EXPECTATION: Your paper should be a SYSTEMATIC description of some aspect of the morphology of some language. I don't really care if you use formalism—there is nothing wrong with plain English prose as long as it is *clear*, *accurate*, and *complete*. Nothing is more frustrating than reading someone's description of morphology that doesn't tell you what you need to know. I hate "descriptions" that say things like, "Hausa forms agent nouns by adding *ma-* to a verb root, for example, *manomi* 'farmer'," and leave it at that. Can you add *ma-* to any verb root? What else happens besides adding *ma-*? Can it be marked for gender and/or number? Is it 100% productive or lexically limited? HOW ABOUT SOME MORE EXAMPLES?! OK, I made this up, but you can find stuff like this in 100(0)'s of grammars. And one reason I don't like using datasets from other people's textbooks, at least on languages I don't know anything about, is that invariably the dataset is missing things that you want to know. For example, in a dataset for Nahuatl, Nida doesn't include future forms with plural subjects, so we don't know how the plural subject *-h* is attached to words that end in consonants! So..., your papers should have at least the following characteristics:

- PLENTY OF DATA!
- Systematic arrangement of data.
- Clear description of the generalizations about the data, whether in prose or rules.

WARNING ABOUT USING DESCRIPTIONS IN REFERENCE WORKS LIKE DICTIONARIES AND TEXTBOOKS: OFTEN THESE WORKS REFER TO SPELLING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MORPHOLOGICALLY RELATED FORMS. FOR EXAMPLE, A SPANISH DESCRIPTION MIGHT SAY, "Verbs ending in *-zar* change *z* to *c* before *e* such as *abrazar* 'to embrace' but *abrace* 'I embrace (present subjunctive).'" THIS IS OF NO LINGUISTIC INTEREST. IN SPANISH, *c* BEFORE FRONT VOWELS AND *z* BEFORE OTHER VOWELS ARE JUST CONVENTIONAL SPELLINGS FOR THE SOUND [s] IN LATIN AMERICAN SPANISH OR [θ] IN CASTILLIAN SPANISH. **YOU WILL LOSE POINTS ON YOUR PAPER IF YOU TREAT SPELLING TRIVIALITIES LIKE THIS AS SIGNIFICANT FOR A MORPHOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION.**

Derivational morphology: productivity, word families

I got some of the ideas for a mid-term quiz on Spanish just looking at the introductory pages of a little paperback Spanish/English dictionary (*University of Chicago Spanish-English, English-Spanish Dictionary*, but probably any dictionary would have something comparable). This dictionary gives a list of derivational suffixes, like *-ón*, with a few examples but nothing about how productive the morphemes are, what they can be added to (could you add *-ón* to an adjective, for example?), nothing about whether they are single morphemes with multiple meanings or a bunch of unrelated morphemes. In working on Russian, I have spent hours with the dictionary looking at *word-families*. It seems like just about every root has a large number of derivational possibilities. For example, if you go to the word for 'meat', you find derived forms based on that root that mean things like 'fleshy', 'butcher shop', 'butcher', an adjective meaning 'made-of-meat', and compounds meaning 'carnivorous' and 'fast-day'. How productive are any of

these derivational patterns, e.g. could one find a comparable set of words based on the root for 'turnip', 'beer', 'bread', etc.? In short, one could take any of the types of derivational patterns suggested by these resources and explore their productivity, limitations, allomorphy, etc.

Inflectional morphology: inflectional classes, dimensions and categories of inflection

One thing the little dictionary mentioned in the previous paragraph gives is tables of all the irregular verbs of Spanish (mixing in trivialities about spelling along with *real* irregularities that have actual linguistic interest). Any teaching grammar of Spanish does the same. There are dozens of paper topics in there. One topic would just be to describe the dimensions that Spanish verbs are inflected for, but there are other topics. For example, can the irregular verbs be grouped into inflectional classes with other verbs? *Pensar* 'to think' is listed as irregular because it changes the root vowel when stressed (*pienso* 'I think'), but how different is it from *rentar* (*rento* 'I rent'), which is not listed? Could we group these verbs as the "same" inflectional class with just some lexical marking that differentiates them in specific cases? Another example: a bunch of "irregular" verbs have a *-g-* in the first person singular, e.g. *tenir* 'to have' but *tengo* 'I have'. Is there anything that groups these verbs? Is there any way to predict which forms with have the *-g-* and which won't? I have used Spanish as an example here and in the previous paragraph, but any language with significant inflectional morphology would provide similar topics.

Languages with "no morphology" (Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, etc.)

These languages are reputed to have "no morphology", but in fact, they afford all kinds of topics relevant to a morphology paper:

- COMPOUNDS: Productivity of various kinds of compounding (N+N, V+N, etc.), compositionality of compounds, compounds composed of apparent synonyms (are these *coordinate*, *exocentric*, *endocentric*?), tone changes associated with compounding, recursivity of compounding (can compounds ever have more than two elements), category effects of compounding (V+V compounds used as nouns or adjectives, etc.).
- REDUPLICATION: What kinds of things can be reduplicated (nouns, verbs, adjectives) and what is the semantic effect of reduplication (intensification or attenuation, diminutiveness)? What tonal effects are associated with reduplication (Mandarin, for example, has "neutral" tone on the second member of some reduplicants, Cantonese has "changed" tone in some types)? What additional morphemes are used in reduplicants (Mandarin can add *yi* between some kinds of reduplicants, Cantonese add *dei* to some)?
- DEPENDENT WORDS (TENSE MARKING, "MOOD PARTICLES"): Languages like Chinese and Vietnamese have many "words" that don't have a real meaning of their own, but must be combined with other words for a full meaning. Among these are things like "tense" markers on verbs, "plural" markers that get added to pronouns or other words, and "mood markers" that are added to the ends of phrases to express attitudes. The "dependent" or affix-like nature of such elements can be seen in their non-independent status and often by special tonal properties, such as the fact that many of them have "neutral" tone in Mandarin.
- TONAL MORPHEMES: Many Asian tone languages can alter the tone of words for meaning effect (for example, Cantonese "diminutive" tone) or to show that a word is part of a more complex structure, such as a compound (a fact already mentioned above).

Morphological analysis of a text

A text in a language can serve as a springboard for a study of some aspect of morphology. You find a morphological phenomenon that comes up in the text, describe that, then expand the description to fill out a more complete analysis in the language as a whole. I like texts from cartoons because the pictures from the cartoons provide the context to understand the text even if it is in a completely unfamiliar language, but any text of a couple of paragraphs in length would do. Provide a free English translation, keyed sentence-by-sentence to the text, and lay out the text with a morpheme-by-morpheme interlinear translation. Then, in the descriptive portion of the paper, provide a systematic description of selected aspects of the morphology that shows up in the text. What you choose to describe would depend on the complexity of the text and what it includes. For example, if there is a good range of verb forms, you may want to systematically lay out the forms that are in the text, then expand on that by showing how they fit into a full paradigm. A sample paper using a text in Hausa this way is posted on the course website.

Allomorphy, particularly morphophonemically conditioned allomorphy

Particularly for students who have taken 120A (and 165A), a good topic would be a description of allomorphy. A study of derivational or inflectional morphology as in the sections above will typically end up revealing allomorphy. For example, much of the alternation in Spanish irregular verb paradigms can be described in morphophonemic terms, that is, with reference to the phonological forms of the words (vowels change depending on stress, consonants change depending on the vowels of the inflectional affixes, and so forth. If you took 120A, you could probably go back and look at some of your assignments, where alternations that you had to describe were really morphophonemic allomorphy, even though you would have described it in purely phonological terms for that class. For tonal languages like Chinese, compound formation and reduplication often result in tonal changes. The types of such changes differ a lot from language to language, but any time a word has a certain tone in one construction but a different tone in another, this is allomorphy, and the type of change and environment for the change need to be described.

English morphology

Just describing how plurals or past tenses are formed or the allomorphs of the prefix *in-* would not make much of a paper topic, but there are plenty of things you could do with English. For example, some affixes, like *-ic*, attract stress (*átom* vs. *atómic*) but others do not (*átom* vs. *átomize*). Some linguists have made a big deal out of this type of difference, speaking of “Type I” and “Type II” affixes. A paper might pick a few affixes and compare them in terms of how they affect their bases. The issues of compositionality and productivity are always of interest. A paper topic might pick a few affixes and test them for these properties on a wide range of bases. For example, the suffixes *-y* (*doggy*), *-let* (*piglet*), *-ette* (*kitchenette*) all seem to express “diminutiveness”. Are they synonymous? How productive are they? Word families involving subsets of affixes, like those mentioned by Haspelmath page 50 figure 3.17, could be incorporated into a discussion of compositionality/productivity. Productivity in inflection is also a possible topic. For example, a large number of verbs ending in *-eep* have past tenses in *-ept* (*keep*, *kept*, etc.). Is this a regular pattern verbs ending in [ip]? Is something similar found with verbs having other vowels or ending in other consonants? If you like formalism and trees, a paper could explore the derivation of words with multiple affixes. Morphology is often described as “right-branching”, but we found words like *undoable* that are ambiguous in terms of their morphological build-up. How common is this? What are its limitations?

English (and probably other languages) is continually creating new morphemes, such as *-athon* (added to words to mean “endurance event”), *-aholic* (added to words to mean “one addicted to”), *-gate* (added to words meaning “scandal related to...”). Where do such morphemes come from? How common are they? What kinds of issues do they raise for morpheme-based vs. word-based theories of morphology?

Formal accounts of morphology

We have explored a number of ways to formalize morphology: *position class*, *morpheme-based lexicon plus rules of concatenation*, *word-based lexicon plus rule schemas* and *rule schema correspondences*. All of these run into problems in details when applied to real cases and none seem to solve all the problems that arise in morphology. For those who are interested in formal and theoretical issues, a paper topic would be to take a morphological dataset of any of the types discussed above and attempt to formalize it in terms of the various frameworks mentioned here or others, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages that are revealed in trying to describe a set of real data in a serious way.