MORPHOLOGY

Paper Ideas

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THESE ARE BASICALLY RANDOM IDEAS THAT POP TO MY HEAD. I WILL ADD TO THE LIST PERIODICALLY.

Verb inflection: Verb inflection, in languages that have extensive verb inflection, offers unlimited paper topics. What inflectional categories are marked on verbs? Can inflectional vs. derivational morphology be clearly distinguished? What is be done by concatenative vs. non-concatenative morphology? How productive is allomorphy that is not purely phonologically conditioned?

Diminutives in various languages: Romance and Slavic languages in particular have productive diminutive formations, e.g. Spanish *gatito*, Russian *Natasha* from *Natalja*, etc. German has –*chen* and –*el*, as in *Mäuschen* 'mousy', *Hansel* for *Hans* (itself a nickname for *Johannes*). Chinese and other Asian languages often use reduplication. Typically these diminutives raise issues of productivity, compositionality, and predictability depending on the form of the base.

Ethnonyms in various languages: “Ethnonyms”—what determines the choice of “ethnic” or “originating from” morphology (Oregonian, Canadian, Coloradan, but not *Oregoner, *Canadan, *Coloradoan; Vermonter, New Yorker, but not *Vermont(i)an, *New York(i)an; Senegalese, Japanese, but no *Senegaler, *Japanian; some places don’t seem to have one—??Michiganer, ??Michiganian; what determines variant roots in some cases, e.g. Texas vs. Texan, not *Texasan, Togo vs. Togolese, not *Togo(i)an?) how well-ingrained are such terms (ask individuals what they call someone from various places—what is someone from Utah, someone from Niger)? how do potential variants rank in acceptability (Vermontan seems somewhat possible, but *Japan(i)an)? Most European languages, and probably languages from other areas have similar issues of varying morphology for ethnonyms related to phonology and other factors. For example, Haspelmath, page 38, gives a list of Italian town names and names for inhabitants.

English: Greek and Latinate plurals like *phenomenon/phenomena, fungus/fungi*—are they formed by rule? lexical? psychologically real (experiment asking speakers the plurals of various nouns)

English: Derivational affixes—productivity of selected affixes (cf. Aronoff’s experiment with *ity* and *ness* with *ous* adjectives)

English: ed and ing verb endings—arguments for syncretic past tense and past participle endings; are the participle uses and the verbal uses the “same” suffixes?

Spanish: Form of articles and gender. Normally, the masculine article is *el* and the feminine is *la*, but if a feminine noun like *águila* begins with stressed *a-* the article is *el*, though the gender of the noun will still be revealed if it is also modified by an adjective. Apparently *el* is also sometimes used with nouns that have an unstressed initia *a-*. This seems to account for the fact that *azucar* varies in gender, i.e. speakers got “confused”, thinking that maybe it was feminine despite the fact that it uses the article *el*.

Korean: nominal affixes—what is derivational and what is inflectional?
Korean: recurrent Chinese formatives—are these words formed by rule or lexical? if lexical, is meaning associated with the parts and how? is the negative pul a “morpheme”?

Korean: causative and passive verbs—do these use the same formative? is its form predictable? is it productive? why do some verbs allow both meanings and some not? why do some verbs have two forms and others one (먹이다 ‘feed’ vs. 먹히다 ‘be eaten’)? are there cases of “blocking”, i.e. a base verb with the meaning that the derived form would give?

Chinese, Vietnamese, and other languages “with no morphology”: All these languages have extensive reduplication processes indicating things like “sort of”, “very”, “repetition”, “kinship”, and other “descriptive” functions. Papers on reduplication could identify functionally different reduplications, identifying their meaning(s), the types of roots that participate, and changes such a tonal alternations, altering the root, and so forth.

Chinese, Vietnamese, and other languages “with no morphology”: Compounding is the standard way to create new words. Haspelmath, pages 11-12, has an interesting dataset of Mandarin compounds for analysis. In compound formation, some roots appear only in compounds, and it this sense, they are something like affixes. Papers on compounding could categorize compound types (noun+noun, verb+object, etc.), productivity of compounding, issues of exocentricity vs. endocentricity, and other issues that Haspelmath raises in Chapter 5.

Bantu (and other class languages): inflectional vs. derivational function of noun class marking—can these functions be separated?

Paper types

- describe a derivational process (productivity, types of restrictions, semantics)
- describe a system of inflection (paradigmatic relations)
- experiment in productivity (Aronoff & Fudeman, pp. 221 ff.)