

## **Dynamics of inflectional productivity**

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Although a wealth of discussion has been conducted on productivity from the most different perspectives, it still remains one of the most controversial issues in current linguistic trends. In particular, since productivity has been largely disregarded in its diachronic dimension, changes in productivity have found only partial explanations.

The present contribution aims to enlighten the mechanisms which lie behind the dynamics of morphological productivity in inflecting-fusional languages. In particular, within the framework of Natural Morphology, which envisages productivity as a constitutive primitive property of inflectional patterns (cf. Dressler 2003: 31), my investigation tackles the diachronic paths of emergence and increase as well as decrease and loss of productivity with respect to the interplay between universal naturalness, type-adequacy and system-adequacy.

Changes of productivity are viewed as the result of the interplay between universals, type and system, and productivity qualifies as the linking member. Accordingly, and also by reference to van Marle's (1988) findings on derivational morphology, the fluctuations of productivity of an inflectional microclass (i.e. a set of paradigms which share exactly the same morphological and morpho-phonological generalisations, cf. Dressler 2003: 35) are claimed to depend primarily on matters of semantics and, more specifically, on the naturalness parameter of biuniqueness (cf. Dressler 1999: 404), to the extent to which the inflection system, although it conforms to the synchronic requirements of a language's type and system, strives toward maximisation of naturalness. In contrast with Bybee's (e.g., 2007: 171) position, I argue that restrictions of the actualisation of rule productivity do not bring about the decrease of productivity of the pattern concerned, neither synchronically nor diachronically. Instead, specifications, e.g. of semantic nature, may result under certain circumstances into an increase of the productivity of a rule.

Evidence is drawn from the data and the analytical results presented in Gardani (2009), where the dynamics of productivity of the nominal microclasses of Latin are detected on quasi-synchronic periods and analysed in their evolution from Archaic Latin (ca. 500 BC) towards Old Italian (1400). Exemplarily, the fate of the Latin u-stems has been determined by their lexical behaviour. In Pre-Classical times, the u-stems of the type *lacus lacūs* show full productivity almost exclusively with respect to certain lexically specified categories of nouns, namely (feminine) phytonyms. The increase of productivity, firstly experienced due to their

semantic specialisation, is followed by a progressive decrease and final loss, when the collapse of the inflectional system of Latin is more advanced and these feminines are attracted by the a-stems of the type *rosa rosae*. The striving of the system toward increased biuniqueness has determined also the emergence of the microclass *poeta poeti* by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Old Italian. As the masculine group of the microclass *casa case*, to which the continuers of the Latin masculine type *poeta poetae* belong, signals the gender inconsistently, a new microclass is created which marks the masculine gender more system-adequately.

The investigation of language data covering a time-span of almost 2,000 years contributes to a theoretically founded and adequate explanation of the nature and scope of inflectional productivity from the viewpoint of morphological typology.

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