ON MORPHOLOGICAL CONTINUA

Rajendra Singh, Professor of Linguistics
Université de Montréal, C.P. 6128, Succ. `Centreville`, Montréal, Canada, H3C 3J7

Morphology is, as is well known, full of gradience and continua. Morphological continua can perhaps be divided into two main types: functional and formal. The continuum `inflection-derivation-composition` (perhaps better called `inherent inflection—dvandva composition`?) is an example of the former type and the continuum normally used to describe facts of Suppletion is an example of the second type. The purpose of this paper is to argue that perhaps the best way to handle morphological continua, particularly of the second type, is to accept Whole Word Morphology's (WWM) (cf. Ford et al 1997, Singh 2001 etc.) claim that words traditionally seen as `morphologically complex` can be, irrespective of how the `complexity`` in question is marked (continuously or discontinuously, segmentally or suprasegmentally etc.), exhaustively parsed into two subcomponents, one of which is variable while the other is constant. Such a move makes other divisions and cuts un-necessary. We shall illustrate the advantages of this approach with Suppletion (very strong, strong, weak, very weak) and with the continuum Stem-Root-Affix (cf. Tuggy 1992 or Lowenstamm 2009, for example) .We should add that there is no reason why ablauting morphology should not be included, perhaps as a case of extremely weak suppletion in Supletion, which like ablauting is quintessentially relational in nature. It is perhaps not an accident that this approach can also provide an elegant solution to the well-known problems associated with continua like derivation–compounding (cf. Paul 1880 and Becker 1992, for example), continua that are synchronically difficult to unambiguously divide into neat categories, irrespective of how fine-grained the divisions are (*pace* Kiparsky 1996). Diachronically and dialectally they reflect the gradual integration of words with (or in) other words. The bi-componential analysis espoused by WWM provides a natural explanation for the gradual demotion of constants that figure in Word Formation Strategies. Finally, we shall argue, that this approach also avoids the problems associated with morphemic segmentation itself. The problems associated with the where and the how of morphemic segmentation have been well-known, at least since Bazell 1949 (for a recent attempt to draw attention to them see Singh and Neuvel 2003 and for a very interesting example of what might be called `ambimorphemicity`, see Bybee 1985). The dichotomy offered by WWM solves these problems and, we believe, rightly exposes the true nature and implications of moves such as Williams'(2000) to treat some Swahili prefixes as stems or Lowenstamm`s to analyze `affixes` as `bound roots`.

We shall conclude by arguing that even if Prototypicality can save some of the cuts traditionally made in morphology (cf. the objections against standard Prototypicality by scholars like McCloskey and Gluckberg 1979,Armstrong,Gleitman,and Gleitman 1983, Murphy and Medin 1985, and Medin and Wattenmaker 1987, amongst others), perhaps we should consider NOT making cuts that in the final analysis remain problematic and only create more and more examples of the nominalist fallacy in morphology.

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