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The Texture of the Lexicon: Relational Morphology in the Parallel Architecture

Abstract:

Linguistic theory has emphasized Humboldt's "infinite use of finite means," to the relative neglect of the "finite means," i.e. the lexicon. What does a language user store in the lexicon, and in what form? We explore this question in the context of the Parallel Architecture (Jackendoff 1997, 2002; Culicover and Jackendoff 2005). Within this outlook, lexical items are pieces of phonological, (morpho)syntactic, and semantic structures, and morphology is the grammar of word-sized pieces of structure.

Unlike classical syntactic patterns, the majority of morphological patterns are not productive, and their instances must be listed in the lexicon. They therefore present a number of important difficulties for a grammar formulated in terms of traditional rules. More adequate is a formulation in terms of *schemas*, along the lines of Construction Grammar and especially Construction Morphology. Nonproductive schemas do not build new structures; rather, they motivate relations among items stored in the lexicon.

In addition to building novel structures, productive schemas can also motivate relations within the lexicon. This leads to a new perspective on productive patterns: the principles used to build novel structures are simply a subset of the schemas in the lexicon, and productive schemas can be thought of as schemas "gone viral." We conclude that the focus in linguistic theory on the "infinite use of finite means" has deflected attention from a more basic issue: the form of the lexicon and the relationships within it.

This outlook on morphological relations in the lexicon has consequences for syntactic theory as well. First, it offers an account of nonproductive syntactic constructions – Culicover's (1999) "syntactic nuts." Second, it suggests a nontraditional approach to syntactic alternations, in which movement operations are replaced by relations between independent constructions. We will briefly mention some possible cases.The fact that the Parallel Architecture extends so readily to such a variety of phenomena is, we believe, strong evidence for the correctness of the approach.