

Morphologization of Phonological Processes as Integration

The proposed paper presents a view of morphologization of phonological processes in which various degrees of integration of these processes into the morphology are possible, and follow a potential trajectory of increasing embeddedness. Debates on morphologization have focused on questions such as whether a phonological process needs to have become inactive, unproductive, or opaque as a precondition for morphologization (cf. e.g. Maiden 1991/2011). While this paper addresses the latter question likewise, the focus here is on how morphological systems integrate and absorb the phonological process and how they interact with the phonology thereafter. Different degrees of integration of phonological processes will be demonstrated with morphologization of vowel harmony in Turkish, consonant mutation in Welsh, fricative voicing in English, and German "umlaut".

In the following, we are assuming a modular grammar including a dynamic morphological component interfacing with lexicon, phonology, and syntax. Further, we assume that the phonology can only "see" phonological structures and only these can provide environments for phonological processes. If a process is restricted to specific morphological or lexical environments, the executive function over it belongs in the morphology and/or lexicon. The process itself will be applied by the phonology, but only under external orders.

As a first step towards morphologization of phonological processes, we can suggest that even prior to any loss of transparency/regularity or phonemicization of erstwhile allophones, there may develop an association between the phonological process and one or more morphological ones. Thus, for example, we would expect that an affinity between vowel-fronting and 'plural' would have been noted by speakers before the weakening of unstressed /i/ to schwa and thus loss of motivating environment in German, likewise between fricative voicing and 'plural' before fricative voicing became inactive as a phonological process in English. This "noting" could take the form of adding a redundant command to the phonology to the morphological operations creating plurals via suffixation etc. Such a scenario is preferable to one in which speakers are staring at the extra fronted vowels or voiced fricatives trying to find a use for them after the demise of productive phonological processes, i.e. wondering what to do with the resulting "junk" (Lass 1990).

While the cases of German umlaut and English fricative voicing could begin with "affinities" and be incorporated into already existing morphological processes such as affixation, ultimately potentially becoming the lone process corresponding to a particular morphological function, e.g. mapping onto 'plural', other pathways may involve rather more general associations with morphological functionality. In Turkish, for example, vowel harmony is observable in most words of two or more syllables, so that its value for associated morphological operations could not be much more concrete than 'I am a word(-form)'/ 'this is a word', i.e. a support for morphological structure in a general sense. Likewise with Welsh consonant mutation: the phonological process affected the entire obstruent series to begin with (Jackson 1953), so the syntactic contexts in which the initial consonant of some element of a construction was modified were particularly varied; here the contribution to the morphology would be something like 'I'm in construction' or 'this is a compound' etc. While Turkish vowel harmony may never progress beyond playing a supporting role in inflection and derivation, there is potential even for processes whose initial morphological function was very general to be "promoted" to the status of sole process in a morphological operation, as can be observed in Modern Welsh where in some dialects the nasal consonant alternation of a word-initial consonant has become the sole expression of 1 p.sg. possession ([kar] 'car' , [və ŋar] 'my car' > [kar] 'car' ~ [ŋar] 'my car' (Jones 1998)). This is, of course, the highest degree of embedding into the morphology a once phonological process can undergo. In principle, then, a phonological process can be integrated first as a support to one or more morphological processes with only a very indirect relationship to morphological semantics, then in time become more closely associated with existing morphological semantic functions, eventually to figure as a morphological process with full status. However, long-term stability can be achieved at any of these stages.

References Cited

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