

Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture – 08
Introduction to Morphology – Part 2

If you do not know morphology, it is going to be a problem for you to analyze the data and if you remember it correctly from the very beginning of the class, I have made it very clear that we are going to do some data analysis, and what data? The data that you would collect and the data that I am going to share with you. That is going to be extremely specific. I am going to be specific about data analysis and morphology is going to play a vital role in my sessions.

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Background concepts

- 13,000 words: Child entering school
- 60,000 words: Typical high school graduate
- 120,000: Literate adult
- Anyone who has mastered a language has mastered this long list of words (lexicon)
- What do we know when we know a word?
- What kinds of information have we learned when we learn a word?



I have already given you some information about what is the number of words that you have when you are a multilingual speaker. Do figure it out and let me know what does your data show. If we look into the English language, here are a couple of numbers that have shown. When a native English-speaking child enters the school, she might have some 13,000 words in her mental lexicon, and typically, a high school graduate will have approximately 60,000 words in the mental lexicon and a literate adult, who speaks a language confidently and with

a lot of ease, without any problem and has a very good intuition about that language, should have something like 120,000 words.

This is just an approximation. Please do not consider it as absolute truth. It might vary from one language to the other, from one speaker to the other, but primarily, if you look at the average data, this is how it looks. 13,000 words when the child enters the school, 60,000 words as a typical high school graduate when she goes to college and then some 120,000 words for a literate adult.

There is a typo out here in the slide. The concern here is that anyone who has mastered any language should have a long list of words and what do we call it in this discipline? We call it lexicon. That is why you must have heard me repeating the use of lexicon quite often. So, make sure when I say lexicon, you should be able to understand that I am talking about a repository. It is like a huge box where you keep all the words, sentences and phrases.

It is generally called a mental lexicon. So, you cannot really see your box kept somewhere and then oh, let us open it and then oh, there are words, there are sounds, there are phrases, there are sentences. It does not happen in that way. You have to imagine it in an abstract manner that whatever usage of language you have, all the words, phrases, sentences, letters phonemes, morphemes, everything, they are going to be a part of an imaginary repository which would be known as lexicon.

With this, we would move to some abstract questions. Let us just try to summarize what we have discussed until now as far as morphology is concerned. We started the discussion with word first, to understand what is a word and once we understood what is a word, we are trying to figure out what is the additional information related to word.

So, when I say 'word', what does a layperson understand and what does a linguist understand? So, the linguist's understanding of word we will take it up in a while, but the layperson's understanding of word is that it is a combination of letters that is going to give you some meanings. Then there are different kinds of words. We did discuss what is an open class word and a closed class word and how the former is different from the latter and then we also talked about some instances of open class words, which bring more creativity to your

speech and how the closed class words are a bit rigid as far as their own place and their own form of themselves are concerned.

So, these are a few issues that we need to understand when we are talking about words. And then we also got to know what is the general statistics we might have, if we are looking at native English-speaking child. Now, you have to think about what I am going to ask you. I am not going to give you the answer. You can probably take it as a formal assignment in which you have to write a bit. What do you think we know when we know a word? Let us say I learned a new word yesterday, in my own language and we might learn new words at any point of time.

So, in my own language, I learned a new word and what do you think when you learn a new word, what is the possible information that you can gather related to that word? That is the first question for you. The question here is right in front of you, it is written here: What do we know when we know a word? Then the second one: what kinds of information have we learnt when we learn a word? That would give us an idea how important word is when you are trying to discuss.

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Background concepts

- Phonetic/phonological information
- Lexical structure information
- Syntactic information
- Semantic information
- Pragmatic information

e.g. **bake** (beik) v. **baked, baking**.

1. to cook, esp. in an oven, with dry heat.

2. To harden and dry in or as if in an oven <bake pottery>- n. A social gathering as which baked food is served, ---- **bak'er** n.



So, let us move to the next set of information. But before that, you need to remember that these are the two questions I will come back to, when we discuss your first language. Here I

am going to share, what sort of different information you might have. I will give you an example and this will eventually help you to think about it from your own first language.

Previously we were talking about what kind of information do you get when you encounter a word in any given language. It is just not about English, it is about any language that you speak, any language that you encounter, but I would give you the examples from English because I have already mentioned that is the lingua franca and the medium of instruction.

I have listed here some information at different levels that you encounter. The information could be related to sound, so that is phonetic information or you can call it phonological information, then there is a lexical structure information. What sort of a lexical structure the particular word is? It can also give you some syntactic information and when I say syntactic information, it is about in what form it can be used in a sentence.

Syntactic means it is related to sentence. Then it will also give you some semantic information, what does it mean? What sort of meanings do you infer, when you see such a word? Then it will also give you some pragmatic information. In what way this particular word has been used in the discourse? That is also going to be a part of your pragmatic information. So, these are various levels of information that you see in a given word within a sentence.

So, let us start it with the one example that I have given here that is 'bake'. So, if you go to any dictionary and you would try to find out the meaning of the word or the information related to the word, you will realize that there is so much information mentioned in the dictionary, related to a particular word. The example that we have here is 'bake'. What is the spelling? The spelling is b a k e and how is it pronounced? The pronunciation is bake and this is a verb. Since this is a verb, it might or it can take inflections like -ed and -ing.

When I say inflection, I am talking about morphological inflection, we will go back to it. A part of word which can be expanded. From bake, we can add -ed or simple -d then it can be baked. We can add -ing and the word is going to be baking. So, from this first line, we realize that the phonological information is that this has a consonant beginning, the /b/ consonant

then there is /ei/, which would be a diphthong and it is a combination of two vowel sounds and then we have /k/ sound which is a consonant.

So, in this case, this is the phonological information and what lexical structure information does it give? Lexically, this is a verb. Why is this a verb? Because we can add the verbal inflections like -ed and -ing. So, that is about lexical and phonetic information. Now, let us see what semantic information does it give. What kind of meaning do we interpret from such a construction? The semantic information is that, the meaning of baking is mainly to cook, especially in an oven with dry heat.

That is the etymological or the literal meaning of baking. You are cooking it following a special procedure and you are not using any other cooking instrument, rather you are actually cooking it in an oven, in dry heat. If you put something in water and you are cooking, it is not going to be called as baked. It will be considered as cooked or boiled.

To call something as baking, there are two fundamentally important things needed; one is an oven and then there is dry heat. So, that is the semantic information we get from such a word called baking. It can also have other kinds of interpretations depending on the context that has been used. For example, we can also say the potter is baking pottery.

In that case, it is not baked. Neither it is baked in the oven nor we are using dry heat. Rather baking pottery means the potter is hardening the material and it is being dried in such a way that it will be considered as pottery after that. So, that would be a different meaning of baking.

The third meaning of baking would be a social gathering in which baked food is served. That is how you are going to use it. So, if I say there is a baking festival happening tomorrow; that means, everything related to baking is going to be discussed. And from bake, if you form baker, that is a noun form. So, there is so much of information available about a particular word bake; how do you pronounce it, what inflections does it take, what are the meanings associated with it, how do you use it in a sentence and what are the different forms or pragmatic information?

So, everything is loaded in such a set. When you encounter a word like bake, you are actually bringing in information related to so many domains: the sound domain, lexicon domain, syntax domain, semantics domain and pragmatic domain. What you need to think about is that, when you use a word from your first language, what are the different levels at which you gather information?

So, the question you should ask yourself is, if this is an English word and these are the kinds of information that I am gathering, what sort of information do we gather when we encounter the words from our own language? That is a task for you think about and then do let me know.

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Understanding Morphology

- A word is an arbitrary pairing of sound and meaning. (??????)
- No distinction between words, phrases and sentences.
- There are words which do not have any meaning.
- Not all sound sequences are words and not all sound sequences that NATIVE SPEAKERS would identify as words have meanings.
- The NATIVE SPEAKERS have an intuition what is a word and what is not?



So, with this information about words, we will move to the linguistics discipline called morphology and as I have just mentioned; morphology is the systematic or the scientific study of words. Here, I expect you to remember that, can it be an arbitrary pairing of sound and meaning? Do you think it could be? I want you to think about it. Can you randomly put any word with any sound and it is going to be considered as a word? Does it happen this way in most of the world's languages? Do you think if you just put anything randomly you are going to create a word for it?

Then the next thing that I want you to think about is that do you think there is a difference between the definition of words, phrases and sentences in the discipline called morphology? Do you think for a morphologist, a word is different from a phrase and a phrase is different from a sentence or in some way the words, phrases and sentences can actually boil down to one single thing? Think about it. This is an interesting question.

Do you think what you define as a word, can be defined as a phrase, can be defined as a sentence? This is something very interesting to understand when you are trying to figure out what morphology is. And do you think there are words which do not have any meaning or all the words have meanings associated with it, what do you think? Any word that you encounter has a meaning or any meaningful combination of letters that you encounter is a word?

Which one seems to be more relevant for a morphologist? To make your life easier, I will ask you these two questions only. First think about if there is any way by which you can consider one definition which would satisfy a word or phrase and a sentence. Then the second question, is there any word which does not have any meaning? Would you still call it a word? These are the two questions for you to take home and to think about when you have time, in the language that you speak. You may also think about English, but then I do not pressurize you to think about English. If you think your own language would be more convenient for you, please go ahead and do that.

To give you a hint or to help you out, what I have observed through my study of morphology is that not all sound sequence are words and not all sound sequences that native speakers would identify as words have meanings. So, this has a correlation with the questions that I have asked. This is what I claim.

But what is your opinion about it? Do you think the statement that has been mentioned here sounds true or do you think that is correct? Do you think all the sound sequences available in any given language can be considered as words? Outrightly, it seems to be no, not really, you cannot randomly put the sound sequences and call it words. I do not think so, but you think about your opinion. And do you think if I say ka, ba, cha and I, as a native speaker, would identify it as a word, do you think, it will have meaning?

The question seems to be simple, but then when you think a little deeper you will realize that there is more into it to think about. Do give it a try and find out the two questions that I have asked you. And then, obviously, the immediate question comes to my mind, because I am focusing a lot on the intuition. The native speakers will have intuition that is what I have been always talking about as a linguist that I am and in linguistics as a discipline, we always focus on the native speaker's intuition.

Do you think a native speaker will always have an intuition to find out, if something can be a word and something cannot be? I do not remember exactly, but a couple of lectures back, I was talking about the possible languages and then the probable languages. So, do you think the combination of words which are possible, can also be probable or if I put it in a different way, do you think you as a native speaker of let us say English or Hindi or Marathi or Telugu will have an intuition to identify whether this combination of letters can be considered as words in your language.

So, do you have that ability to predict it accurately and if you can predict it accurately, is there any randomness to it or you always think that this is an organized system? That means, a particular combination which would be considered as a word, will always be considered as a word and there is no way by which some other speakers of your community are not going to recognize it as a word. It is not that easy a question, but then do think about the possible combinations of words that you have in your mind, when you use your own language and try to find out if you have that ability to predict.

This combination has the potential to be a word and this combination does not have the potential to be a word. So, think about all these questions that I asked and then we will talk about morphology in more detail in the next section.

Thank you.

Keywords: mental lexicon, arbitrary relation between words and their meanings, native speaker's intuition