

Obviating lexicalism: A structural account of exocentricity and metaphorical extension

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1. Introduction. The inflectional behaviour of polysemous nouns poses a challenge for single-engine theories of morphology. Namely, some “non-prototypical” usages of irregular nouns regularize (1a,2a), while others do not (1b,2b).

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|-----|----|-------------------------------|-----|----|---------------------------------|
| (1) | a. | goose (tailor’s iron) → geese | (2) | a. | œil ‘eye (of a needle)’ → œils |
| | b. | foot (unit of measure) → feet | | b. | cheval ‘horse(power)’ → chevaux |

Lexicalist approaches to these data often recur to the notions of exocentricity and metaphorical extension to capture these differences (Kim et al. 1994; Marcus et al. 1995; Pinker 1998). Since an iron is not a type of goose, *goose* in (1a) is exocentric and regularizes. In contrast, *foot* in (1b) is, at least in its original usage, a literal foot, so it is a case of metaphorical extension and does not regularize. However, neither of these arguments is valid in a framework where roots are devoid of semantic and phonological content (Acquaviva 2009; Harley 2014).

2. Background. This proposal builds on work that formally distinguishes names from nouns based on a “naming” layer, $n_{[NAME]}P$, in the structure (Jambrović 2021). $n_{[NAME]}P$ as a functional projection is both theoretically and empirically motivated. First, nouns and names are interpreted differently: in broad strokes, *mouse* is a set of entities identified by common properties, while *Mickey* is a set of entities identified by a common name. Second, nouns and names have distinct inflectional behaviour: the plurals of *Child*, *Wolf*, and *Freeman* are the regularized forms *Childs*, *Wolfs*, and *Freemans*, not **Children*, **Wolves*, and **Freemen*. These data suggest that a structure in which naming precedes inflection will result in regularization.

3. Analysis. Since exocentric nouns and names both regularize, I argue that “exocentricity” is a label given to a structure that contains a $n_{[NAME]}P$ layer. For instance, *goose* in (1a) is so “named” because of its curved handle, just as *œil* in (2a) is so “named” because of its circular, hollow shape. Of course, *goose* and *œil* are nouns, not names, meaning that they must be sets of entities that are identified by common properties, but in containing a second nominalizer, these properties do not have to be those of the noun that is the source of the name. That is, (1a) and (2a) have the structure in (3).

- (3) [NumP [nP [$n_{[NAME]}P$ [$\sqrt{\quad}$]]]]

A non-cyclic head like Num can only access the root through a single, null cyclic head, but there are two in this structure (n and $n_{[NAME]}$), ruling out contextual allomorphy (Embick 2010).

On the other hand, “metaphorical extension” describes a structure with more than one encyclopedic entry. With abstract concepts like units of measure, no naming is involved: *fifty feet* is the length of fifty human feet, and *cinquante chevaux* ‘fifty horses’ is the amount of power generated by fifty horses. If there is no $n_{[NAME]}P$ layer, the root is visible to Num and can trigger contextual allomorphy. Familiar cases of structures that have more than one encyclopedic entry are *crown*, *hand*, and *property*.

4. Conclusion. A structural account of the data in (1) and (2) eliminates the need for exocentricity and metaphorical extension as explanatory factors. If a particular noun contains a naming layer, it is predicted to regularize, capturing the phenomenon that is commonly associated with exocentricity. If no such naming layer is present, the noun is not predicted to regularize, and any ambiguity is resolved by the encyclopedia.

References

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