Metasyncretism and secondary exponence in L_RFG

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In recent years, *morpheme*-based realizational models of morphology have exclusively assumed interfaces with derivational models of syntax; two prominent examples of this move are Distributed Morphology and Nanosyntax, both of which are paired with Minimalist syntax. However, there is nothing about morpheme-based realization that is intrinsically derivational. L_RFG is a model of morphology (Asudeh, Bögel, and Siddiqi, 2023) that unites morpheme-based realization with the *non-derivational* constraint-based syntactic framework of LFG. In this talk, we show that this union offers insights into two phenomena that any theory of morphology must account for: *metasyncretism* and *secondary exponence*.

This is illustrated through an analysis of the nominal declensions of Latin, a complex fusional system that expresses 5 cases (6 if vocative is counted), 3 genders (masculine, feminine, neuter), and 2 numbers, with nouns belonging to (a minimum of) 5 distinct declension classes.

(1)

MASC	CLASS 2		CLASS 3	
	SG	PL	SG	PL
NOM	-s	-ī	-s	-μ-s
ACC	-m	-μ-s	-m	-μ-s
GEN	-ī	-rum	-is	-um
DAT	-μ	-ī-s	-ī	-ibu-s
ABL	-μ	-ī-s	-e	-ibu-s

Metasyncretism is the phenomenon whereby the same syncretism patterns arise in different paradigms; i.e., while the pattern is consistent, the exponent of the pattern can vary across paradigms (Williams, 1994; Bobaljik, 2002; Harley, 2008; Albright and Fuß, 2012), as with the DAT and ABL plurals in Class 2 (-*ī*) and 3 (-*ibu*) in (1). Contemporary DM analyses of metasyncretism account for the Latin type via a combination of containment among case features (Caha, 2009) and Impoverishment (Halle and Marantz, 1994), where the latter is a very powerful mechanism. In L_RFG, by contrast, metasyncretism of the Latin type arises from case containment and a direct disjunction in the exponents (what DM often calls *realizations*) of vocabulary items. For example, the metasyncretism of -*ī* and -*ibu* is realized via the vocabulary item in (2). Like Impoverishment, disjunction is potentially powerful, but L_RFG uses it conservatively, restricting it to only the exponence side of its vocabulary items. Moreover, the L_RFG analysis encodes the relationship between metasyncretism and simple syncretism directly: the application of the syncretism across multiple classes is expressed in the same rule that would otherwise express a simple syncretism.

(2) $\left\langle \begin{array}{l} [\mathrm{K}],\ @\mathrm{DAT} \\ (\uparrow \mathrm{NUM\ PL}) =_c + \end{array} \right\rangle \xrightarrow{\nu} \begin{bmatrix} \mathrm{PHONREP} & /\bar{\imath}/ \\ \mathrm{DEP} & \mathrm{LT} \\ \mathrm{CLASS} & \mathrm{X}{=}1 \vee \mathrm{X}{=}2 \\ \mathrm{HOST} & \begin{bmatrix} \mathrm{IDENT} & + \\ \mathrm{CLASS} & \mathrm{X} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \vee \begin{bmatrix} \mathrm{PHONREP} & /\mathrm{ibu}/ \\ \mathrm{DEP} & \mathrm{LT} \\ \mathrm{CLASS} & \mathrm{X}{=}3 \vee \mathrm{X}{=}4 \vee \mathrm{X}{=}5 \\ \mathrm{HOST} & \begin{bmatrix} \mathrm{IDENT} & + \\ \mathrm{CLASS} & \mathrm{X} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$

Secondary exponence is the mechanism that captures the phenomena of *morphological conditioning*, such that contextual allomorphy arises. In DM, secondary exponence occurs when a feature is discharged by one VI rule but conditions the realization of other VIs (Noyer, 1997). The standard proposal is that though each feature is only realized once, features can figure in the environment for other realizations. In L_RFG, by contrast, it is not features (which are in f-structure)

but c-structure heads that are the locus of realization. Multiple VI rules can thus be constrained by the presence of particular features, without the problems that arise in Minimalist DM, where heads and features occur in the same representation.

Our illustrative L_RFG account of the Latin nominal declension system shows that—beyond L_RFG's interest as a theory that unites syntactocentric models of morphology (like DM and Nanosyntax) with traditionally lexicalist constraint-based syntactic frameworks (like LFG)—L_RFG also offers fresh insight into significant puzzles in contemporary morphosyntax.

References

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