

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF MORPHOLOGICAL ALTERNATION IN ENGLISH

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The morphological system of language reveals its properties through the morphemic structure of words. It follows from this that morphology as part of grammatical theory faces the two segmental units: the morpheme and the word. But, as we have already pointed out, the morpheme is not identified otherwise than part of the word; the functions of the morpheme are effected only as the corresponding constituent functions of the word as a whole. For instance, the form of the verbal past tense is built up by means of the dental grammatical suffix: train-ed [-d]; publish-ed [-t]; meditat-ed [-id].

The said difficulties compel some linguists to refrain from accepting the word as the basic element of language. In particular, American scholars — representatives of Descriptive Linguistics founded by L. Bloomfield — recognised not the word and the sentence, but the phoneme and the morpheme as the basic categories of linguistic description, because these units are the easiest to be isolated in the continual text due to their "physically" minimal, elementary segmental character: the phoneme being the minimal formal segment of language, the morpheme, the minimal meaningful segment. Accordingly, only two segmental levels were originally identified in language by Descriptive scholars: the phonemic level and the morphemic level; later on a third one was added to these — the level of "constructions", i.e. the level of morphemic combinations.

In fact, if we take such notional words as, say, water, pass, yellow and the like, as well as their simple derivatives, e.g. watery, passer, yellowness, we shall easily see their definite nominative function and unambiguous segmental delimitation, making them beyond all doubt into "separate words of language". But if we compare with the given one-stem words the corresponding composite formations, such as waterman, password, yellowback, we shall immediately note that the identification of the latter as separate words is much complicated by the

fact that they themselves are decomposable into separate words. One could point out that the peculiar property distinguishing composite words from phrases is their linear indivisibility, i.e. the impossibility for them to be divided by a third word. But this would-be rigorous criterion is quite irrelevant for analytical wordforms, e.g.: has met - has never met; is coming —is not by any means or under any circumstances coming.

As for the criterion according to which the word is identified as a minimal sign capable of functioning alone (the word understood as the "smallest free form", or interpreted as the "potential minimal sentence"), it is irrelevant for the bulk of functional words which cannot be used "independently" even in elliptical responses (to say nothing of the fact that the very notion of ellipsis is essentially the opposite of self-dependence).

In spite of the shown difficulties, however, there remains the unquestionable fact that each speaker has at his disposal a ready stock of naming units (more precisely, units standing to one another in nominative correlation) by which he can build up an infinite number of utterances reflecting the ever changing situations of reality. This circumstance urges us to seek the identification of the word as a lingual unit-type on other lines than the "strictly operational definition". In fact, we do find the clarification of the problem in taking into consideration the difference between the two sets of lingual phenomena: on the one hand, "polar" phenomena; on the other hand, "intermediary" phenomena.

Within a complex system of interrelated elements, polar phenomena are the most clearly identifiable, they stand to one another in an utterly unambiguous opposition. Intermediary phenomena are located in the system in between the polar phenomena, making up a gradation of transitions or the so-called "continuum". By some of their properties intermediary phenomena are similar or near to one of the corresponding poles, while by other properties they are similar to the other, opposing pole. The analysis of the intermediary phenomena from the point of view of their relation to the polar phenomena reveal their own status in the system. At

the same time this kind of analysis helps evaluate the definitions of the polar phenomena between which a continuum is established.

In this connection, the notional one-stem word and the morpheme should be described as the opposing polar phenomena among the meaningful segments of language; it is these elements that can be defined by their formal and functional features most precisely and unambiguously. As for functional words, they occupy intermediary positions between these poles, and their very intermediary status is gradational. In particular, the variability of their status is expressed in the fact that some of them can be used in an isolated response position (for instance, words of affirmation and negation, interrogative words, demonstrative words, etc.), while others cannot (such as prepositions or conjunctions).

The nature of the element of any system is revealed in the character of its function. The function of words is realised in their nominative correlation with one another. On the basis of this correlation a number of functional words are distinguished by the "negative delimitation" (i.e. delimitation as a residue after the identification of the co-positional textual elements),* e.g.-. the/people; to/speak; by/way/of.

The "negative delimitation" immediately connects these functional words with the directly nominative, notional words in the system. Thus, the correlation in question (which is to be implied by the conventional term "nominative function") unites functional words with notional words, or "half-words" (word-morphemes) with "full words". On the other hand, nominative correlation reduces the morpheme as a type of segmental signeme to the role of an element in the composition of the word. Summing up what has been said in this paragraph, we may point out some of the properties of the morpheme and the word which are fundamental from the point of view of their systemic status and therefore require detailed investigations and descriptions.

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