

Reanalysis² and the directionality of “change events”: Bringing morphological change into the fold

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The assumption that language change is (uni)directional has long been at the core of formal approaches to phonological and syntactic change and has made it possible to derive a typology of possible and impossible change events in these domains from the interaction of principles specific to language acquisition and “third factor principles” (Chomsky 2005), cf., e.g., for phonology $\theta > f$ but $f \not> \theta$, Honeybone 2016; for syntax cf. economy principles such as Upwards Reanalysis, Roberts & Roussou 2003; the Late Merge Principle, van Gelderen 2004, 2011, etc. However, it is unclear how morphological change fits into this picture – is morphological change directional, and what are impossible morphological changes? What (if any) is the domain of morphological change?

The goal of this talk is to discuss a preliminary typology of directional, misparsing/misanalysis-driven changes in the domain of derivational morphology and argue that these follow from the same principles as the types of changes we observe in phonological and syntactic change, and are in turn constrained by the rules that govern derivational directionality at the synchronic level (Grestenberger & Kastner 2022). In order to motivate this further, I revisit Walkden (2021)’s arguments “against mechanisms” (sc. of language change) and in favor of understanding reanalysis purely as the description of a “change event that takes place at the individual level” (reanalysis²). I argue that the directionality of these change events may make it necessary to revisit reanalysis as a cause of observed change events.

References

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