

When is a suffix not a suffix? Crosslinguistic evidence of morphological complexity

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Dixon & Aikhenvald (2003:28) define a compound word as a single grammatical word that contains subunits: i.e., a compound word is a discrete word that happens to contain other words. Anderson (1992:294) demonstrates the difference between the internal structure of a simplex word and a compound word in the data below.

(1) Simplex versus compound words

a. Simplex

[search], [party], [milk], [tooth]

b. Compound

[[search] [parties]_H], [[milk] [teeth]_H]

Each compound word in (1b) contains two simplex words without the domain of a greater word. Furthermore, there is one head per compound, a single word within the compound that serves to define its grammatical category (e.g., noun, verb, adjective, etc.) as well as act as a staging point for the accretion of derivational or inflectional morphology.

Morphology is robustly attracted to the head of a word. This affixation can bypass other morphological material. Anderson (1992:302) refers to these kinds of words as composites, which are words with an intermediate level of complexity between simplex and compound words. The head of the word defines its category, but other morphological material exists outside the bounds of the head. We can see examples of this behavior in the data below.

(2) Composites in other languages

a. Georgian

[mo [v- k'lav]_H]

PV 1S-kill

'I killed him'

b. Icelandic

[[köll -uð-um]_H st]

call -PAST-1PL MID

'we were called'

c. Mandan

[wa- i [wa- sek]_H] =o'sh

UNSP- PV.INS 1A- do =IND.M

'I did something'

d. Russian

[[kaž -et]_H s'a]

seem-3S RFLX

'it seems'

In all the data in (2), a prefix or a suffix is attracted to the head of the word and some derivational material remains outside the domain of the head. In Mandan, a Siouan language of North Dakota, we see the same distribution of morphology as we see in (1a), (1b), and (1d) with the exception that there is also a prefix that is aligning itself to the left edge of the overall word. This language

appears to have a set of prefixes that attach to the head of the word and those that attach to the overall left edge of the word.

Kasak (2019:310) notes that little previous analysis has been done to distinguish between morphology selecting for the head of a word versus the overall edge of the word. Most analysis glosses over this distinction by merely treated the head of the word as the locus of affixation, but as the data in (2c) show. We can also see this process at work in English, seen in the data below.

(3) Head- versus edge-seeking suffixes

- a. [[pass]_H [by]]
- b. [[pass-er]_H [by]]
- c. [[pass-er-s]_H [by]]
- d. [[pass]_H [by] -able]

Certain compounds in English allow suffixes to become trapped inside the word, as in (3b) and (3c). This behavior stems from the fact that *pass* is the head of the word above, rather than *by*. The suffixes *-er* and *-s* are attracted to right edge of the head of the word, rather than the right edge of the word itself. This is in contrast to (3d), where *-able* appears at the rightmost edge of the word, not on the head.

This work demonstrates that there is a heretofore unmentioned distinction between head-seeking and edge-seeking affixes, and this distinction across languages is not typologically uncommon, as it exists both in English and in Siouan languages like Mandan.

Works cited:

- Anderson, Stephen R. 1992. *A-morphous Morphology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Dixon R. M. W. & Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald. 2003. Word: A typological framework. In Dixon, R. M. W. & Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald (eds). *Word: A crosslinguistic typology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
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