

Phonology-morphology domain (mis)matches in Huave

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The morphological structure of verbs in Huave (a language isolate of southern Mexico) can be diagnosed through affix ordering, specifically by looking at the placement of so-called "mobile affixes," which can appear as prefixes or suffixes depending on morphophonological context (Kim, in press). Mobile affixes divide into one group that always appears inside certain non-mobile prefixes and suffixes, i.e. closer to the verb root, and another that always appears outside of them, i.e. farther away. An additional set of outermost non-mobile affixes completes the picture. These ordering facts are taken as evidence of hierarchical morphological structure, with "zones" of affixes extending symmetrically on either side of the verb root. The hierarchical position of mobile affixes is thus fixed, while separate morphophonological factors determine whether they surface before or after the root in any given verb form.

The question addressed in this talk is the extent to which these symmetrical morphological domains also define domains for the application of phonological processes. I argue that while there is evidence of phonology being sensitive to inner vs. outer levels of morphological structure, there is also an asymmetry in that some phonological processes take only the stem plus suffixes as their domain, crucially excluding prefixes. Similar prefix-suffix asymmetries with respect to phonology are attested in a wide variety of languages, such as Italian (e.g. Nespor & Vogel 1986), Indonesian (Cohn 1989), and Itelmen (Bobaljik & Wurmbrand 2001), to name but a few.

Given the evidence from the ordering of mobile affixes, the stem-plus-suffix domain can hardly be a morphological constituent. An alternative standard analysis would be to consider the stem along with its suffixes as a Phonological Word, with boundaries that are non-isomorphic to morphological ones. Since prefixes are excluded from this Phonological Word, they would not be visible to phonological processes taking place within it.

A problem with this analysis, however, is that not all stem + suffix combinations, nor all prefixes, form valid freestanding prosodic units; i.e. there is a lack of independent evidence for the phonological wordhood of posited phonological words. I examine several potential solutions, such as morphological reanalysis, assessment of word minimality at non-surface levels, and, finally, the possibility that phonology must have direct access to morphological structure in ways not normally allowed under traditional conceptions of morphology-phonology interaction.

References

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