

Methodological alternatives for studying morphological productivity in Plains Cree

In this presentation, I'll discuss two methodological (alternative or complementary) methods for studying morphological productivity, with a focus on Plains Cree verb stem formation. I'll point to the divergent conceptualizations of "productivity" the two and the potential of a combined analysis.

Morphological productivity is defined as "the possibility for language users to coin, unintentionally, a number of formations which are in principle uncountable" (Schultink 1961). On the one hand, productivity has been surveyed through the corpus-based analysis of attested complex words (Baayen 1992, 1993, Gaeta & Ricca 2005). In this perspective, productivity is described by the ratio of hapax legomena (occasionalisms, words that occur only once in the corpus) per the total number of tokens displaying that process. On the other hand, in a different approach, productivity is measured through the acceptability rate that speakers give to nonce formations (complex words that they likely hear for the first time) (Lamberty & Schmid 2013). In this approach, a morphological schema is more productive the more acceptable it is for speakers in statistically significant terms. Although the two measurements are radically different in nature, they both capture the perception that speakers of the language may have, based on the statistical probability of encountering and understanding new words formed out of specific processes. Using both methods will tell a lot about the intra and inter-speakers coherence of morphological knowledge.

Surveying the morphological productivity of typologically complex languages is relevant to test the hypothesis of a threshold that differentiates productive from non-productive patterns. Also, given that the morphological potential of Algonquian languages includes the expression of basic syntactic relationships (e.g. noun incorporation), this survey will test the hypothesis of a difference in productivity between syntactically-motivated and non syntactically-motivated processes. The potential for applying these research results to language teaching in and outside the classrooms are multiple, as both the corpus-based data and the acceptability judgements results can be the source for teaching activities that focus on the acquisition of complex words which may be relatively rare in spoken language. This presentation will include preliminary data from attested occurrences of the medial *-âskwa-* (wakâskwan 'it is crooked pole', ôhpâskwaham 's/he lifts it up with a stick', cimâskwan 'it is short') from the Bloomfield corpus (Bloomfield 1930; 1934) and itwêwina: Plains Cree dictionary.

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