

# Introduction to morphology

LING 481

Winter 2011

# Let's break the ice

1. Find 2 people who have not taken phonology I (451)
2. Find 3 people who have not taken syntax 1 (461 or 507)
3. Find 2 people who have taken phonology 1 at different times or with different teachers
4. Find 2 people who have studied or done research on a Native American language
5. Find someone who has studied an African language
6. Find someone who speaks a language other than English natively

# This lecture

- Morphology, morphemes
- Goals of morphology and linguistics
- Morphological typology

# “Morphology”

- First applied to linguistics by Schleicher (1859)
- Haspelmath and Sims definition
  - “study of systematic covariation in form and meaning of words” (p. 2)
- Google “morphology”

# Morphological analysis

- Typically, identification of meaningful constituents of words
- e.g. Hungarian ‘house’ ‘river’

sg nominative	ház	folyó
sg accusative	házat	folyót
pl nominative	házak	folyók
- Analysis of Hungarian
  - -(a)t *acc*, -(a)k *pl*
- The morpheme, a convenient starting point
  - “smallest meaningful constituents of words” (p. 3)
  - “a pairing between sound and meaning”
    - largest phonological sequence associated with a given meaning

# *Morpheme $\neq$ syllable*

	number of morphemes	number of syllables
cat	1	1
cats (cat, -s)	2	1
carton	1	2
smarten (smart, -en)	2	2
sycamore	1	3
hamamelidanthemum	1	7

**syllable edge  $\neq$  morpheme edge**

# Practice with Tzutujil

3. Identify the morphological constituents and their meanings in the following Tzutujil verbs (Dayley 1985: 87) (A note on Tzutujil spelling: *x* is pronounced [ʃ], and *7* is pronounced [ʔ].)

<i>xinwari</i>	'I slept'	<i>xoqeeli</i>	'we left'
<i>neeli</i>	'he or she leaves'	<i>ninwari</i>	'I sleep'
<i>ne7eeli</i>	'they leave'	<i>xixwari</i>	'you(PL) slept'
<i>nixwari</i>	'you(PL) sleep'	<i>xe7eeli</i>	'they left'
<i>xateeli</i>	'you(SG) left'	<i>xwari</i>	'he or she slept'
<i>natwari</i>	'you(SG) sleep'		

How would you say 'I left', 'he or she sleeps', 'we sleep'?

# Inadequacy of morphemes

- A major focus of Haspelmath and Sims
- Hence less adequate definition of morphology as “study of combination of morphemes to yield words”



# Goals of morphology

- Large-scale goals
  - Describe, explain morphological patterns of human languages
  - Language-particular description
    - what are the **morphemes** of the language?
    - what are the **categories** of morphemes?
      - which morphemes are **bound/free**?
      - which are **roots/affixes**?
    - what are parts of speech/lexical category (verb, noun, etc.)
    - how are specific kinds of morphemes put together to form words?

# Goals of morphology

- Smaller scale goals
  - Elegantly describe languages
  - Describe languages in cognitively realistic way
  - Explain patterns in morphology-external terms
  - Devise restricted architecture for description

# Elegant description

- “elegant and intuitively satisfactory way” of describing linguistic structure
  - “the main criterion for elegance is generality”
  - goal: a general solution
- leads to generalities, or “rules”
  - e.g. rule for plural formation in English: add  $-/z/$
- but “linguists differ in their judgements” re elegance

# Cognitively realistic description

- Getting at morphological competence
  - Elegant and general description not good enough
- Descriptions “should express the same generalizations about grammatical systems that the speaker’s cognitive apparatus has unconsciously arrived at”
- E.g. the *wug* test
  - speakers can create plural forms of words that they hear for first time
- Description rejected if cognitively implausible

# System-external explanation

- Why are the patterns the way they are?
- Explanations for language-particular patterns
  - “most facts about linguistic patterns are historical accidents”
    - “and as such cannot be explained”
  - E.g. why is English pl formation –z?
- Explanations for universal facts about morphology
  - E.g. why are “nouns denoting people...quite generally more likely to have plurals than nouns denoting things?”

# “Restricted architecture for description”

- A.k.a. development of linguistic “theory”
- Goal: formulate general design principles of the grammatical system to constrain descriptions
- Explanations are system-internal
- Theme of most (400-level and higher) linguistics classes at UW (generative, formalist orientation)

# The place of morphology in linguistics

- Is there a morphological component?
  - Some syntacticians consider inflectional morphology a component of syntax
  - Some morphology as unproductive phonology?

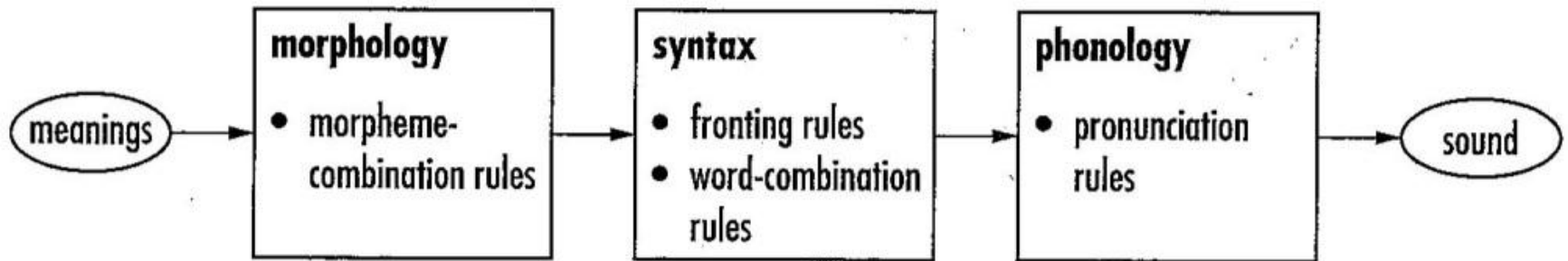


Figure 1.1 A possible descriptive architecture for grammar

# Morphological typology

- Think of a language you know that has lots of affixes.
  - Mandarin has almost NONE!
  - English doesn't have as much as ...
  - Japanese & Korean have a lot – *verbs*
  - German and Latin have lots



# Morphological typology

- Classifies languages according to the degree to which meaningful elements are expressed as separate words
  - “What one language expresses morphologically may be expressed by a separate word or left implicit in another language.” p. 4

# Some points on the Analytic...Synthetic continuum

- analytic/isolating lgs: “language has almost no morphology” (p. 5)
  - standard examples: Vietnamese, Yoruba, Mandarin
- synthetic lgs: “where morphology plays a more important role”
  - agglutinative: “almost all words are formed by concatenation of morphemes” (p. 319) (e.g. Hungarian)
  - polysynthetic: “when a language has an extraordinary amount of morphology” (e.g. W. Greenlandic Eskimo)

# Hungarian

- Hungarian as an “agglutinating” lg

	‘house’	‘river’
sg nominative	ház	folyó
accusative	házat	folyót
pl nominative	házak	folyók
accusative	házakat	folyókat

- Analysis of Hungarian

– -(a)t *acc*, -(a)k *pl*

– acc pl is 2 suffixes: -(a)k<sub>pl</sub>-at<sub>acc</sub>

# Morphological typology

- These are Haspelmath and Sims' terms!  
Beware variation among linguists...
  - Others: Isolating                      Polysynthetic
  - Fusional                      Agglutinative

# Degree of synthesis

- Quantifiable as # morphemes/word in random text

Language	Ratio of morphemes per word
West Greenlandic	3.72
Sanskrit	2.59
Swahili	2.55
Old English	2.12
Lezgian	1.93
German	1.92
Modern English	1.68
Vietnamese	1.06

**Table 1.1** The degree of synthesis of some languages

*Source:* based on Greenberg (1959), except for Lezgian

# Summary

- Languages differ in morphological resources
- Morphemes a convenient starting point for study of morphology
- Linguists differ in how morphology is viewed, goals of linguistics (including morphology)