

Morphological productivity and morphological processing

Morphological productivity refers to the phenomenon that some word formation processes are used frequently to form new complex words, whereas other word formation processes do so only occasionally. Various studies have sought to ground morphological productivity in morphological processing.

In the first part of my presentation I will discuss results reported by Jen Hay and Ingo Plag for English (NLLT 2004). They show that in English less decomposable affixes cannot occur outside more decomposable affixes. However, an attempt to replicate their results for Dutch in a non-trivial way failed. This suggests that there are stronger constraints on parsability in English compared to Dutch, and it is as yet an open question why.

In the second part of my presentation I will discuss experimental data on morphological processing in language comprehension, especially with respect to the role of the frequency of the complex word and that of its base. Recent results obtained with Lee Wurm for English and Laura Balling for Danish call into question the common assumption that these frequencies are diagnostics for rote and rule based processing. I will discuss the consequences of our findings for the understanding of the relative frequency effects reported by Hay (2003).