

Morphologized Alternations: Typology and Diachrony

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My general aim is to investigate morphologized alternations, such as ablaut and umlaut in the modern Germanic languages, from typological and diachronic perspectives. But I will also be concerned with a specific hypothesis, that has been advanced, for instance, by Ford and Singh (1983: 67), namely that morphologized alternations (in contrast to affixes) will not spread to mark new oppositions. To take two straightforward examples: Ablaut has been marginally productive in the recent history of English, for instance with the spread of the *sing—sang—sung* pattern to *ring—rang—rung*, but this is within the marking of a particular opposition (citation form—past tense—past participle); we do not find ablaut being extended to mark new oppositions (such as number in nouns). A more interesting example is umlaut in German, which is more productive; but again, we find that extensions (such as *Hof*, plural *Höfe*) continue to mark the same oppositions (here, plural number in the noun). A nice test case is provided by mutations (initial consonant alternations) in the Celtic languages. Mutations are conditioned by a wide range of factors, including some that are clearly syntactically induced rather than the result of contact with a mutation-inducing element. I will address the question whether such widespread and functionally heterogeneous morphologized alternations are also subject to the same constraint as Germanic ablaut/umlaut, relating similarities and differences to the particular properties of particular morphologized alternations.

I will also critically address a tacit presupposition of the hypothesis referred to in the first paragraph, namely that affixal marking can be extended to new oppositions. I will suggest that extensions of affixes seem to be constrained in general in the same way as extensions of morphophonemic alternations, i.e. morphophonemic alternations are indeed generally constrained as implied by the hypothesis that is being tested, but that this does not seem to be a clear difference between morphophonemic alternations and affixal morphology.

The paper thus aims to answer a general theoretical question concerning the nature of morphologized alternations by bringing to bear typological and diachronic data.

Reference

Ford, Alan & Rajendra Singh. 1983. 'On the status of morphophonology'. In J., Richardson et al. (eds.): *The Interplay of Phonology, Morphology, and Syntax*, 63-78. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.