
The morpheme-morphome continuum

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A piece of morphology which appears systematic but does not correspond to any natural morphosyntactic category is usually labelled 'morphomic', after Aronoff (1994). These one-to-many mappings constitute the opposite pole of what form-meaning relations 'ought' to look like and yet they do not appear to be especially vulnerable in language change (see e.g. Maiden 2011). Purely morphological determination is usually invoked in these cases whereas for morphemic phenomena morphosyntactic considerations are usually preferred. What is usually forgotten, however, is that between 'natural class' distributions and unrestricted ones there are various intermediate configurations.

The literature on the morphome has tended to focus on whether specific elements are morphomic or not. Different researchers or models may draw the border at different points in the continuum, depending on feature structure, the status of mechanisms like blocking or other assumed properties of morphosyntactic architecture. However, the dichotomization of quantitative variables is often not a scientifically desirable practice (MacCallum et al. 2002). My purpose, therefore, is to improve our understanding of the morpheme-morphome continuum by identifying the various scales of variation at work (in the vein of Canonical Typology, Corbett 2005), thus increasing our understanding of the possible relations between form and function in grammar.

References: Aronoff, Mark. 1994. *Morphology by itself: Stems and inflectional classes*. Cambridge (MA): MIT press • Corbett, Greville G. 2005. The canonical approach in typology. In Zygmunt Frajzyngier, Adam Hodges & David S. Rood (Eds.) *Linguistic diversity and language theories*: 25-49. Amsterdam: John Benjamins • Maiden, Martin. 2011. Morphological persistence. In Martin Maiden, John Charles Smith & Adam Ledgeway (Eds.), *Cambridge history of the romance languages*: 155-215. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press • MacCallum, Robert C., Shaobo Zhang, Kristopher J. Preacher & Derek D. Rucker. 2002. On the practice of dichotomization of quantitative variables. *Psychological Methods* 7: 19-40