Gestalts, impostors and semi-affixes: Boundary issues between phonology and morphology

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Intuitively, most linguists will agree that *-er* in *nicer* or *painter* is different from *-er* in *feather, slender* or *bother*, and that *boy-* in *boyhood* represents a different kind of unit than *boy-* in *boycott*. Yet, the boundary between morphological structure and 'mere' phonology can be difficult to draw. This issue, which touches on the question of what falls within the realm of morphology and what doesn't, will be discussed from various angles in this talk.

From a theoretical perspective, we see difficulties in classification and categorization, e.g. in the analysis of "semi-" or "pseudo-affixes" like German *-e* in *Treppe* 'stairs' (Eisenberg & Fuhrhop 2013: 209) or singleton affixes like English *-ric* in *bishopric* and *-ison* in *comparison,* as well as more generally with phonaesthemes (Kwon & Round 2015). From a cognitive perspective, the lines between phonology and morphology are drawn in the language user's mind, with the result that word-internal structure appears to be "intrinsically graded" (Hay & Baayen 2005) and speakers may show individual differences in the recognition and productive use of patterns (Dąbrowska 2012, De Smet 2016). Similar-looking structures can give rise to *gestalt* effects (Köpcke & Panther 2016), and indeed come to converge with affix patterns in various formal or semantic ways (Weidhaas & Schmid 2015). This suggests that, from a usage-based perspective, all recognizable structure can be considered beneficial for the storage and processing of words.

I will discuss a variety of data, mostly from Germanic, and interpret the observations in the light of a model of morphology based on lexical relations (Jackendoff & Audring 2020).

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