Morphology is at the Center of Linguistics

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Abstract: This write up raises a lot of arguments in agreement to the assertion that morphology is at the core of Linguistics. The essay discusses how morphology is related to phonology, how morphology is related to semantics and how morphology is related to syntax. It is evidenced that words are distributional and that the sentence position in which a word can occur is determined by its category. It also emerges that a syntactician cannot operate without a phonologist. In other words, one cannot study syntax without morphology and that morphology has link with syntax. Another broad aspect of this write up is that there is the link between morphology and syntax in many ways. One area of great interest of both a morphologist and a syntactician is that of agreement morphology. Morphology and agreement provide a clear morphologist’s view point of the matter informed by his extensive experiences as typologies. An area which stands at the cross road between morphology and syntax concerns the way in which grammatical relation such as subject and predicate are realized and the types of alternation in valency that are found. This has led to an investigation of notions of argument structure. Regarding the meaning of a word in isolation, the lexical decomposition theory or componential analysis could be useful.

Keyword: Morphology & Linguistics.

1. Introduction

According to Andrew, (1999) morphology is an integral part of Linguistics which is described as the study of the structure of words. Words are therefore at the meeting point of Phonology, syntax and semantics. According to Sekyi Baidoo, Semantics as a Linguistic discipline is the field of language study that concerns itself with meaning. Syntax is the study of the structure of sentence. In other words, there is an important relationship between morphology, phonology, syntax and semantics. Words have phonological properties which are articulated to form phrases, clauses and sentences. They are of the view that the form of words indicate clearly their function and their parts are usually made up of meaningful smaller pieces. Words enter in to relationship by virtue of their form to constitute lexical categories. In the heyday of American structuralism, morphology and phonology were principal objects of study. Morphology had been called the Poland of Linguistics. It is important to note that the study of morphology in generative linguistics was largely eclipsed by phonology and
syntax in the early days. It came to be that when morphology was considered at all, it was regarded as essentially either a part of phonology or a part of syntax. This essay focuses on discussing the assertion that morphology is at the centre of linguistics. The following sub fields of Linguistics would be considered in the discussion: morphology; phonology, semantics and syntax.

Starting with how morphology and phonology are related, there are some affixes which when attached to the base form of a word, would affect the pronunciation. Having in mind that phonology is the study of the sound system and patterns of a language, the operations of how this systems work concerns with the abstract mental aspect of the sounds of a language, a phonologist cannot study a sound system of a particular word without first considering the word and its form. One important thing to note about the relationship between morphology and phonology is seen explicitly when we consider how the –ed sounds are realized.

2. Discussion

A Phonetician cannot study how this sound is realized in isolation but he is obliged to attach the –ed sound to words before it would make meaning. The –ed sounds in English are bound affixes that are attached to regular verbs to form their past tense and their past participles. The- ed is realized in three main forms. When the –ed sound follows a voiced consonant sound or a vowel sound, it is realized as /d/ as in the following words; played, stayed, borrowed, trained, dried and tried. In the situation where the –ed sound follows a voiceless consonant sound, it is realized as /t/ as in the following words; walked, stopped, asked, finished, and laughed. However, when the –ed sound follows a word that ends with /h/ or /d/, the –ed becomes a separate syllable and realized /id/ as in the following words; wanted, limited committed, transmitted, tempted and contaminated. To a very large extent, the variants of the past tense morpheme of regular verbs are in three forms as indicated above. In other words, the allomorphs of the past tense morpheme in regular verbs are realized in three forms such as /d/, /t/ and /id/.

Another aspect to be considered in this discussion is the realization of the plural markers which take the –es or just the –s form. The plural markers in this regard have three realizations such as /s/, /z/, and /iz/. It is very important to note that when the –es or the –s. Plural marker comes after any voiceless consonant sound apart from a sibilant sound, the Plural marker is realized as /s/ as appears in the following words; tables, books, pots and pipes. The plural marker in this category is also realize when the –es comes after a voiced consonant apart from a sibilant sound, the plural marker is realized as /z/ as appears in the following Words; boys, bags, news, and wives. The –es or –s plural marker is also realized as /iz/ and as a Separate syllables as appears in the following words; churches, boxes, matches and churches. This is how the phonological system could be determined based on the structure or form of Phonological utterances.

In other analysis of the relationship between morphology and phonology is the stress pattern of the sound system. A phonologist cannot determine the sound system without relying on a word. In the sound system of the English Language, stress is an important part of the sound system. A phonologist or phonetician could only study the stress pattern through the words. In a language like English, some words could be used as nouns as well as verbs. When the word is in isolation, the stress pattern gives the difference. Let us consider the following examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nouns</th>
<th>verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Import</td>
<td>import</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td>mistake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invent</td>
<td>invent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The stress pattern could not be determined without a word. In the examples above, through zero affixation, the same words which are used as nouns could be used as verbs. There is the process of adding zero morphemes to the noun to get the verb. The only difference is that the stress is on the first syllable when the word is used as a noun but when the word is used as a verb, the stress falls on the second syllable. This is why one cannot deal with Phonology without the study of the structure of words. Likewise, one cannot deal with emphatic or constructive stress without depending on the study of the structure of words.
Considering the process of blending, when a word ends with a consonant sound and the next word which follows begins with a vowel, then both words are pronounced as if they were one. To exemplify, the words ‘as if,’ ‘after all’ ‘call off’, are pronounced as if they were one. Without a word, a phonetician could not do this.

Focusing our minds on the process of assimilation which is the phonemic process that occurs when a sound takes on some features or properties of another sound by virtue of the fact that they are in the same phonemic environment, the first sound changes one of its features as the result of the sound that follows then we have the regressive or the anticipatory assimilation. This is also called backwards assimilation as in the word handkerchief. The /k/ influences the /n/ and it becomes /づくり/. This is to say that sound B influences sound A or the second sound influences the first sound. No phonologist would determine this process without the structure of the words. It is on this note that morphology becomes an integral part of phonology. To further exemplify, let us consider the following examples: 1. That boy, 2. Good boy and 3. Ten pens. In the three examples, the second sound in each example influences the first one. In examples 1, the /b/ influences the /t/ while in example two; the /b/ sound influences the /d/. In the third example, the /p/ sound influences the /n/ sound.

Progressive or perservative assimilation like the regressive assimilation, one sound influences the other. However, the first sound rather influences the second one. The first sound would not change but the second sound would change. The change is in voicing. To exemplify, let us consider the following words; bags, asked, committed, demanded, and walked. In bags, the /g/ sound influences the /s/ sound to form the /z/ sound. Similarly, in asked, the /k/ sound influences the –ed sound to become /t/. In committed the /t/ sound influences the –ed sound to become /id/. In a similar situation, the /d/ sound in demanded influences the –ed sound to become /id/. In walked, the /k/ sound influences the –ed sound to become /t/. It is obvious to say that the sound system above could be studied by the form or structure of words. This is why I would agree that morphology is at the meeting point of phonology.

In the coalescent assimilation, both sounds influence each other and a new sound is formed. To exemplify, let us consider the following examples;
A. Last year
B. Could you,
C. should you.
In example A, the /t/ and the /y/ sound influences each other to form /ts/. In example B, the /d/ and the /j/ sound influence each other to form /dʒ/. In example C, the /d/ and the /j/ sound influence each other to form /dʒ/.

In the process of aspiration which occurs when a voiceless plosive comes at the initial position of a word, it should be followed by a vowel as in pen, pet, ten, team, key and king. The sounds are articulated with puff. That is an amount of air comes out.

The study of allophones and phonemes would also depend on the form of words. This is why one would say to a very large extent that morphology is inseparable from phonology. In other words, one cannot study morphology without words.

Considering intonation, a researcher cannot research into intonation without considering words in sentences. Whether the writer uses the rising or falling intonation, it would surely be in relation with a word in a sentence.

Morphology does not only link with phonology but also, it links with semantics as well. It is in this light that Levin and Rappaport Hovav indicate that there is also the relationship between morphology and semantics. The recent discoveries have been uncovering the ways in which semantics principles underlie the organization of much of the lexicon and this has an impact of course on the way that derivational morphology works. There had been the interface question which borders students a lot. Aronoff holds the view that inflectional pragmatics can be autonomous with regards to phonology, semantics and syntax. Aronoff (1994), argues that the existence of stems provides evidence for the autonomy of morphology. He indicates that in Latin, a verb has three stems which may be idiosyncratic or derived by regular and productive option but that is not possible to say that a giving stem has a meaning as such. It functions as part of the morphological system but as a pure phonological form—a further instance of separatism. The stem as such has no meaning but contributes non-compositionally to the meaning to the whole word form. There is the question of productivity, an issue at the border of
linguistics proper and sociolinguistics. A lot of examples could be considered. It is important to note that the form that the word takes informs the meaning. In other words the form of a word indicates the semantics. The addition of morphemes changes the word class from a noun to an adjective. Let us consider the following examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nouns</th>
<th>Adjectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>ill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Ghanaian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the above examples, it is clear to indicate that when the following words are considered, the meaning that is got from the first section is that those words are names of things and places while in the second section, through the addition of a bound morpheme, new word is formed which indicates or suggests another meaning which implies that those words are adjectives.

Considering another category of words, different meanings could be got from their usage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enact</td>
<td>enactment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculate</td>
<td>calculator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat</td>
<td>repeater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induce</td>
<td>inducement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering the above examples, it is clear that section one words are verbs because they imply an action while the words in the second section indicate that they are names of things. Therefore the meaning a speaker wants to convey depends on his choice of words. Nobody can study semantics without the form that the word takes.

In another analysis, the following examples are worth mentioning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>Adverbs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slow</td>
<td>slowly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick</td>
<td>quickly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary</td>
<td>necessarily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>beautifully</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first section, the words suggest that they are adjectives because they can describe things while the words in the second section are adverbs because they can show the manner of how something is done.

Regarding the meaning of a word in isolation, the lexical decomposition theory or componential analysis could be useful. This is to say a word like ‘woman’ suggests the meaning of an adult female human. In the same situation, the word ‘bachelor’ suggests an unmarried male adult human.

Regarding the meaning that words give in sentence level, let us consider the following sentences:

a. She goes to school
b. They go to school.
c. John’s pen looks nice.
d. These pens look nice.
e. Those pens look nice.
f. John is a tall boy.
g. John is taller than Joshua.
h. John is in the class.
i. The woman speared the kangaroo.
j. The kangaroo was speared by the woman

There are different meanings that the choices of words suggest in the above sentences. In example 1, the choice of the verb ‘goes’ indicates that the subject of the sentence is the third person singular and at the same time suggests that it is in the present tense.

In sentence 2, the choice of the verb ‘go’ indicates that the subject of the sentence is a plural subject and at the same time suggests that it is in the present tense. In sentence 3, the choice of the verb
‘visited’ indicates an action which took place in the past and indicates that the subject of the sentence is either plural or singular. In sentence 4, the choice of the genitive’s’ indicates that the pen belongs to only one person, John. The choice of the demonstrative adjective ‘these’ gives a different meaning which implies that the pens are more than one and that they are near the speaker. However, the choice of the demonstrative adjective ‘those’ in example 6, gives a different meaning which implies that the pens are more than one and that they are far away from the speaker. In example 7, the use of the adjective ‘tall’ informs us that there is no comparison and that it is only one person who is being talked about. In example 8, the use of the adjective ‘taller’ informs us that there is a comparison between two people. In example 9, the use of the adjective ‘tallest’ informs us that there is a comparison among more than two people. The use of the adjective ‘tall’, the comparative ‘taller’ and the superlative ‘tallest’ gives different meanings above. In example 10 a, and 10 b, the two sentences express the same meaning. In 10 a, and 10 b, both the subject in the two sentences express the same semantic role. This is to say the subject in sentence 10 a though becomes the object in sentence 10 b expresses the same meaning of an actor or initiator of the action in the two sentences. In other words, through the process of passivization, the subject of an active sentence becomes the object and the object the subject. It is explicit to say that the meaning a speaker wants to convey is informed by his choice of words. This at a very large extent comes to confirm the assertion that morphology has a link with semantics and that no one would study semantics without morphology.

Another broad aspect of this write up is that there is the link between morphology and syntax in many ways. One area of great interest of both a morphologist and a syntatician is that of agreement morphology. Morphology and agreement provide a clear morphologist’s view point of the matter informed by his extensive experiences as typologies. An area which stands at the cross road between morphology and syntax concerns the way in which grammatical relation such as subject and predicate are realized and the types of alternation in valency that are found. This has led to an investigation of notions of argument structure. This assumption could be traced back to Levin and Rappaport. There is a morphosyntactic evidence to attest to the fact that words are distributional. This is to say the sentence position in which a word can occur is determined by its category. Let us consider the following sentences in this analysis;

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a. -------------------- is hardworking.
b. Joyce--------- to school.
c. The girl---------------- beautiful.
d. The flower looks-------.
e. He came----------
f. I gave Joan --------
g. I gave a pen to --------
h. The hunter kill ------
i. Jane is happy ------
j. I hit the nail -------- straight into the wood.
k. ------ boy broke the pot.
l. ------- son is intelligent.
m. That tall boy --------is respectful.
```

In the analysis of sentence 1, it is the category of nouns that can occupy that position. Considering sentence 2, it is the category of linking verbs that can occupy that position to make the sentence grammatical. In the analysis of sentence 3, it is the category of nouns that can occupy that position. In sentence 4, it is the category of adjectives that can occupy that position to make the sentence correct. Talking about sentence 5, it is the category of adverbials that can occupy that position to make the sentence grammatical. In the analysis of sentence 6, it is the category of noun phrases that can occupy that position to make the sentence grammatical. In the analysis of sentence 7, it is the category of nouns that can occupy that position to make the sentence correct and conforming to the rules of grammar. Similarly, in the analysis of sentence 8, it is the category of noun phrases that can occupy that position to make the sentence correct and conforming to the structured rules of grammar. In the analysis of sentence 9, it is the category of nominal clauses that can occupy that position to make the sentence accepted and conforming to the structured rules of grammar. In the analysis of sentence 10, it is the category of
prepositions that can occupy that position to make the sentence correct and conforming to the demands of grammar. Talking about sentence 11, it is the category of determiners that can occupy that position to make the sentence grammatical. In sentence 12, it is the category of the genitive “’s” that can occupy that position to make the sentence grammatical. In the analysis of sentence 13, it is the category of adjectival phrases that can occupy that position to make the sentence grammatical.

3. Conclusion
Considering the above analysis, one could conclude by saying words are distributional and that the sentence position in which a word can occur is determined by its category. Basing on this analysis, a conclusion could be drawn that a syntatician cannot operate without a phonologist. In other words, one cannot study syntax without morphology and that morphology has link with syntax.

To conclude, this write up raises a lot of arguments in agreement to the assertion that morphology is at the core of Linguistics. The essay discuses how morphology is related to phonology, how morphology is related to semantics and how morphology is related to syntax.

4. References