Patterns, their components, and anti-syncretism

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Abstract

The talk introduces and discusses the concept of *component analysis* for grammatical forms. Component analysis becomes necessary whenever construction-like grammatical phenomena are analysed. Constructions, from a phenomenological perspective, are atomic linguistic signs whose form consists of several distinguishable form components. A paradigm case of such multi-componential signs can be found in German nominal and verbal inflection where often a vowel change co-occurs with a particular ending, as in "Kopf-Köpfe" ("head/heads"), where the plural "morpheme" consists in Umlaut+schwa ending, neither of which can actually be seen as an affix in the usual sense (schwa is no phoneme of German!).

Traditional analyses of German inflection emphasise the suffixes as core exponents of inflection. This is in accordance with currently dominant so-called "item-and-arrangement" views on inflection where inflectional elements are seen as morphemes that are simply attached to lexical morphemes. I will show that this is insufficient for the analysis of some regularities of German inflection. Also, from a theoretical perspective the traditional view on inflection is misleading as it delegates other aspects of inflection, especially prosodic requirements for particular inflection classes, to different parts of the grammar. The interaction of different components of some inflection in shaping the surface form of an inflected word can be understood if another core aspect of inflection is integrated, namely *anti-syncretism requirements*.

While component analysis is introduced with the example of synthetic inflection, it is applicable to construction-like entities more generally, in particular, analytic constructions, like the German perfect construction, and combinations of such constructions. We will also see that component analysis provides a natural basis for OT treatments of morphosyntax.