

Motivating multiple exponence

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A preliminary typological survey reveals that Multiple Exponence (ME), the one-to-many mapping between a morphological category and its formal expression, is more common and more varied - both across and within languages - than previously assumed (Caballero & Harris 2012). These typologically diverse patterns of morphological redundancy arise through different diachronic pathways, including paradigmatic analogy (Albright 2005, 2006), affix trapping (Harris & Faarlund 2006), affix reordering (Haspelmath 1993), and hypercharacterization (Kuryłowicz 1947). While the diachronic development of ME is relatively well understood (Harris 2015), the synchronic analysis of this phenomenon poses important challenges, as it stands in conflict with widely-held principles of economy and structural complexity, as well as incremental morphological theories. As growing documentation of morphological systems of lesser-studied languages brings to light more cases of ME, some important questions arise: What leads to the synchronic stability of ME? In which ways is the emerging typological picture of this phenomenon shaped by usage-based (comprehension/production) pressures? And what aspects of these usage-based factors should be hardwired (if at all) into morphological theory?

In this paper, I report on an ongoing investigation of the synchronic motivation of ME in Choguita Rarámuri (CR; Uto-Aztecan), carried out in collaboration with Vsevolod Kapatsinski (University of Oregon). CR, a highly agglutinating language spoken in Northern Mexico, has productive patterns of ME, where words containing an inner marker that is either of limited productivity or phonologically reduced *optionally* add a second, outer exponent that is completely superfluous semantically. We tested the perceptual functionality of ME in CR through a speech-in-noise task carried out in the field. Our results show a significant effect of adding a redundant marker: ME helps with recognition of the cued meaning when this meaning is unexpected from context, but it is detrimental when the meaning is expected from context. We interpret these results as evidence of a mechanism of pragmatic inference at play, whereby redundantly marked forms are expected only when they would enhance the form-meaning connection of the meaning expressed, a pattern which diachronically results in hypercharacterization (Caballero & Kapatsinski 2014). Our results stand in contrast with those of Harris & Samuel (2011), who found that ME conveys no functional advantage in Batsbi (Nakh-Dagestanian; Georgia). While our divergent results from those of Harris & Samuel's might be the result of differing methodologies used to assess the functionality of ME (a lexical decision task vs. a gating task), our results might also suggest that ME patterns may vary in terms of synchronic functionality, an observation predicted in Optimal Construction Morphology (Caballero & Inkelas 2013).

Selected references.

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