

The Derivation/Inflection Distinction and Post-Syntactic Merge

An investigation of nominal morphology in Persian shows that there is a direct relationship between morpheme type and word-level stress, which always falls on the last syllable of the word. Standard “derivational” suffixes are treated as part of the word domain and receive primary stress (1), whereas “inflectional” suffixes fall outside the word-stress domain (2). However, the strict correspondence between morpheme type and word-level stress does not hold with the verbal agreement morpheme, which attracts stress like derivational suffixes when attached to present stems (*xaah-ím* ‘want-1pl’), but falls outside the word stress domain when attached to past forms (*xaást-im* ‘want.Asp-1pl’). A traditional approach that pre-determines morphemes as belonging to one class or another will have difficulties accounting for the dual behavior of the agreement morpheme in Persian. We will show, however, that the stress pattern observed can be directly obtained from the structural configuration.

Based on the nominal stress pattern, we argue that word-level stress applies post-syntactically at the highest structural position of the prosodic domain *nP*. For the example in (2), we suggest that the indefinite marker is outside the *nP* domain (in D^0) and does not receive word stress. We will show that, by considering *vP* as the prosodic domain for the verbal forms, the stress facts will follow straightforwardly. We propose that the verbal forms *xaah-ím* and *xaást-im* both have the structure shown in (3). Note that we claim that the morpheme traditionally referred to as Tense in the Persian literature is in fact an aspect morpheme within *vP* marking the completion of an event. While the morpheme marking aspect on the verb stem in Persian is overtly realized (via a suffix ending in *d/t*) in the past form, it has no overt realization in the present. Thus in the past form, the overtly realized aspect, being at the edge of *vP*, receives stress. In the present form, in line with recent works in Distributed Morphology, we propose that a post-syntactic reordering takes place (cf. Embick and Noyer 2001). In this instance, the higher Agr morpheme merges with the adjacent null aspect head forming the configuration in (4). Stress is then realized on the Asp+Agr string.

In traditional approaches, morphemes are often pre-categorized as either derivational or inflectional based on their phonological or syntactic properties. In this paper, we show that the distinct properties of morphemes can be accounted for based on their relative position in the syntactic configuration. The application of the readjustment operation and assignment of word-level stress rely crucially on the syntactic structure and provide support for the close relation between syntax and morphology argued for in recent syntactic approaches to word-formation (Marantz 2001, Travis 1999, Hale and Keyser 1993) as well as the correlation with prosody.

Examples:

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|-----|-------------------------------------|---------------------|----------|
| (1) | a. zibaa-yí | (beautiful-Nominal) | ‘beauty’ |
| | b. kaar-gár | (work-Agent) | ‘worker’ |
| (2) | ketaáb-i | (book-Indef) | ‘a book’ |
| (3) | [Agr [vP Asp Root]] | | |
| (4) | [vP [Asp _φ + Agr] Root] | | |

References:

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