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Fine phonetic detail in word stem and suffixes carry rich information about a word's morphological structure. Even when the phonological content of a stem remains unchanged by the addition of a suffix (e.g., *rock/rock-s*), phonetic variation in segment duration, vowel quality, or other acoustic features can reflect properties of the word's inflectional and derivational paradigms, as well as its role in the larger morphosyntactic context. Yet, although these patterns may offer valuable insights into speakers' strategies of lexical storage and retrieval, they are not all equally useful to listeners during real-time speech perception. In this talk, I discuss some apparently contradictory patterns of phonetic variation in morphologically complex words and offer a model of lexical storage and retrieval that may account for them. Finally, I finish with some experimental evidence that reveals listeners' blithe disregard for features reflecting paradigmatic properties. As far as listeners are concerned, morphologically-conditioned phonetic detail is only valuable in the context of the larger sentence.