
New thoughts on an ancient form-function mismatch

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Background: The postulate of category-neutral roots is adopted within DM/Distributed Morphology (Marantz 1995, Harley 2005 *et seq*) and EXO/exo-skeletal approaches (Borer 2005a, b) to lexical categories. Within both frameworks, categorization of roots as verbs, nouns, adjectives occurs in syntax. They differ in that DM assumes categorizing functional heads (*v*, *n*, *a*) while EXO assumes an indirect process of categorization of roots by functional material like Asp(ect) or T for verbs, or D for nouns – but not necessarily by categorizing heads. Still another approach (LEX) holds that categorization takes place in the lexicon (cf. e.g. Baker 2003). Developing empirical and/or conceptual criteria deciding on DM-EXO-LEX is an important desideratum with far-reaching consequences.

Problem/Question: **Are there languages where these heads *v*, *n* or *a* are ever systematically overtly realized when they apply to roots?** In order to address this, one needs to find a language where systematically every verb or noun is morphologically segmented in a root and a categorizer, where this categorizer does not have to make any other morpho-syntactic contribution (i.e., it must lack any other feature apart from [*v*], [*n*] or [*a*]). The typological literature reveals that no such language has ever been attested, except for three possible counterexamples (Classical Nahuatl, Ancient Greek and Sanskrit). As we will argue, these counterexamples are only apparent. We refer to this generalization as the No Overt Root Categorizer Generalization, NORCG. If NORCG can be established as a universal, either of DM-EXO-LEX should provide an explanation for this clear morphology-syntax mismatch. We will discuss these seeming counterexamples.

Discussion and possible account: The first step in the derivation has a special status (e.g. Kayne 2009; Chomsky 2013: 47; Alexiadou & Lohndal 2017). It involves a root *R* and categorizer *k* merged as $\{R, k\}$. We discuss the new idea that the members must not be linearized, but be externalized simultaneously as $\frac{k}{R}$. Within $\{R, k\}$, *k* cannot be a free-standing word, plausibly related to the fact that bare roots cannot be free-standing either. This relationship is captured in the way the set gets externalized: *k* and *R* coincide. This way, agglutination is a morphological reflex of linearized structure. However, whenever a complex word exhibits fusional, synthetic, suppletive or null morphology, this indicates that linearization has *failed*. Failure of linearization, in turn, is implied by the first step in the derivation which delivers head-head configurations. This derives, then, NORCG also within frameworks like DM: If anything, one expects the morphology to which categorizers of roots give rise to be synthetical, suppletive, fusional or null.

Reference: Kayne, R. (2009). Antisymmetry and the Lexicon. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook*.