
Concatenation and templates

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The widely held belief that so-called non-concatenative morphology was special is contingent on the hypothesis that there exist well-defined units of form and meaning (i.e., morphemes) which cannot be arranged in a sequence of adjacent linear segments. Instead, they correspond to discontinuous roots, and to markers located in various positions within the linear chain, thereby breaking the linearity of the root. Building on the foundational work of Guerssel & Lowenstamm (1990), I challenge this view in much of my past work (Bendjaballah & Haiden 2008, 2024; Bendjaballah 2012, 2014 *a.o.*) I adopt a phonological framework where skeletal positions are not necessarily linked to melodic content. This framework enables us to posit empty skeletal positions that intervene between root positions in the linear order but which do not break up the contiguity of the root because they are empty at that level. At a later stage of the derivation, these empty positions are identified by markers. In this sense, non-concatenative morphology turns out to be concatenative: each marker corresponds to a coherent sequence, but only at its own level (root, derivation, inflection, etc.). Such a framework renders non-concatenative morphology fully compatible with the Borer-Chomsky conjecture (Borer 1984) which states that parameters are fixed in lexical entries. For non-concatenative morphology, the parameter specifies that certain classes of roots contain empty slots at specific internal positions. In this talk I review this argument and illustrate it with a set of non-concatenative phenomena from different languages, including both Afroasiatic languages such as Taqbaylit (Berber) and Somali (Cushitic), and languages outside this family such as Standard German. I show that, in all cases, a templatic position dedicated to the realisation of the respective non-concatenative marker can be identified. I furthermore show that templatic marker positions are related to adjacent marker positions in a manner governed by the principles familiar from concatenative morphology, most notably the Mirror Principle (Baker 1985).

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