

Reviews

Rochelle Lieber, *Introducing morphology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xii + 215pp. ISBN 978-0-521-71979-7 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-521-89549-1 (hardback).

Reviewed by MARK ARONOFF
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In *Homo academicus* (1984) and elsewhere, Pierre Bourdieu distinguishes four types of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. The last three (often grouped together under the single term SOCIAL CAPITAL) are elaborations of Max Weber's notion of social status and are powerful tools for understanding the behavior of academics. Briefly, academics strive to accumulate social capital by demonstrating their production and accumulation of knowledge, which is usually measured in terms of research productivity and reputation, the two most important measures in evaluating faculty members for promotion and tenure.

What, my reader is surely asking at this point, does this have to do with a textbook? Everything, is the answer. Writing textbooks earns one very little in the way of social capital. Paul A. Samuelson's *Economics* may be the best selling higher education textbook of all time (over four million copies sold to date) but it was his status as '[...] the foremost academic economist of the 20th century', in the words of his *New York Times* obituary, not his textbook, that earned him the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences. And in small fields like linguistics, writing textbooks doesn't even produce much economic capital. In none of the many years that I have been an editor of one of the most widely used introductory textbooks in the field have I ever earned anything close to five figures from the book.

One ploy that some textbook writers have all too commonly adopted is to use the occasion to address not students but their peers, thus demonstrating their prowess to the members of their guild and gaining social capital within it. The results are bewilderment on the part of students, the supposedly intended audience, and an even

worse reputation for linguistics as a deliberately obscurantist field. Indeed, when reading such textbooks I am often reminded of the old joke: ‘What happens when you cross a Mafioso with a postmodern literary critic? An offer you can’t understand’.

So if we have so little chance of gaining either economic or social capital from writing elementary textbooks, why do we do it? In the words of L, WONDER and LOVE. An equally appropriate term might be SEDUCTION. Simply put, L loves morphological analysis and she wants to instill that love in others, so she wrote this book, not in order to gain capital but out of love, the one human value that may transcend Bourdieu’s theory.

So how good a seducer is L? Being a person who, like L, has been head-over-heels in love with linguistic morphology for most of my life, I may not be the best one to ask. The editors should probably have found instead an intended seducee to review the book, an undergraduate student. But that’s not the way we do things in academic journals, so I will have to try to put myself in the position of a fresh-faced tyro.

L’s first and smartest (one might even say cunning) decision was to leave theory until the end (chapter Ten ‘Theoretical challenges’, pp. 177–96). L advertises the last chapter of the book as ‘[...] your first taste of the theoretical challenges that morphologists face’ (p. 177). It is thus possible to master almost all of the content of this book without much at all in the way of theoretical knowledge. Of course, as L acknowledges, ‘[...] no text is theory-neutral’ (p. ix), but she does a remarkably good job at presenting morphological phenomena in a way that theorists of just about every modern stripe would accept. L believes ‘[...] that students will gain a better understanding of theory if they already have the ability to find data and analyze it themselves’ (p. x), but even this last chapter presents only ‘[...] a few theoretical debates’ (p. x), rather than a full-fledged theoretical position.

L also understands the importance of knowing where the student is coming from. Thus, after a brief ten-page introduction (Chapter One, ‘What is morphology?’, pp. 1–9), she begins the second chapter (‘Words, dictionaries, and the mental lexicon’, pp. 11–30) with a discussion of dictionaries. For newcomers to linguistics, after all, the answer to the fundamental question ‘what is a word’ lies in the dictionary, preferably a big one. L shows that the right answer lies instead in speakers’ mental lexicons.

The remaining chapter topics are standard: familiar types of lexeme formation (Chapter Three, pp. 31–57), productivity and creativity (Chapter Four, pp. 59–73), more exotic types of lexeme formation like infixation, ablaut, reduplication, and templates (Chapter Five, pp. 75–85), inflection (Chapter Six, pp. 87–115), typology (Chapter Seven, pp. 117–41), morphology and syntax (Chapter Eight, pp. 143–55) and morphology and phonology (Chapter Nine, pp. 157–76).

There are exercises at the end of each chapter, perhaps not as many as some prefer, but there are plenty of resources available elsewhere for the instructor who would like students to do more. There are also what L calls ‘challenge boxes’ in each chapter, which are designed for groups of students to work on together, and how-to sections in about half of the chapters, which contain tips for doing morphological analysis. The book also contains a glossary (pp. 197–206).

My favorite textbook of morphological analysis is still Eugene Nida's *Morphology: the descriptive analysis of words*, the first ever written, published in 1949, and long out of print. The book contains 216 problems drawn from a wide array of languages distributed across nine chapters. Nida describes it as '[...] a text for teaching descriptive linguistics' (vi) but it is actually a manual for novice linguists preparing to go out into the field to write grammars and includes several chapters on field methods. The book is devoted entirely to methods of morpheme identification and analysis and is rigorously procedural, a linguist's version of Child, Bertholle & Beck (1961/1970). Despite my infatuation, however, all my attempts to get students to appreciate Nida's book have failed. They want to know not just how, but why. And here, L strikes a very nice balance. The chapters are organized around issues, with the discussion and exercises designed to get the students to understand the point of the analysis.

Most textbook authors do not begin with L's atheoretical posture. Instead, they either adopt a single position or present a survey of current theories, purportedly for the sake of balance. I do not advocate the last position at all, which, in my experience, only confuses beginning students. Textbooks that resolutely work through a single theoretical position can be wonderful, my favorite being Akmajian & Heny (1980) on transformational syntax. The main problem with such books is that they can also quite quickly become outdated, as theories change. After all, what is the value of traditional transformational syntax these days? The major disadvantage of an analysis-based book like L's, by contrast, lies precisely in its atheoretical stance, which might lead the beginning student to believe that analysis takes place in a theoretical vacuum. The solution that I have adopted in my own teaching is to make liberal use of additional readings to flesh out theory. There are excellent handbooks of morphology in general (Spencer & Zwicky 1998) and of more specialized areas like compounding (Lieber & Stekauer 2009) or word formation (Stekauer & Lieber 2006), from which to select individual theoretical articles. For early perspectives, I am particularly fond of the *Readings in linguistics* books, which contain classic articles from the first half of the twentieth century. Hamp, Joos, Householder & Austerlitz (1995), which abridges both of the earlier volumes, is still in print. Many of the classic articles from the 1940's and 1950's by authors like Charles F. Hockett and Charles E. Bazell, remain relevant to today's debates, and they give students a wonderful sense of the continuity of the field when combined with later readings from the handbooks.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must confess that I too am the author of an introductory textbook in morphology (Aronoff & Fudeman 2010), written out of the same basic motive as L's, and very similar in size and scope (eight chapters with similar titles, a little over 300 pages in length). There are a few other competitors, though only Coates (1999) is as resolutely introductory and analysis based. Comparing them all, what strikes me and comforts me most is the general agreement among the books on what the fundamental questions are. It is sometimes disparagingly said that there are as many theories of morphology as there are morphologists. Oddly, this remark doesn't faze most of us practicing morphologists; and morphologists, for the most part, are much less contentious than other linguists, despite the absence of theoretical consensus. That is because, as these elementary textbooks show, what unites

morphologists is not theorizing about the object of their affection, but pure love of the object itself. L has concocted a fine potion. Only the experience of students will tell us if it will have lasting effects.

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Reviewed by ANTONIETTA BISETTO
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Early Sranan was an analytic creole language spoken in Suriname from as early as the middle of the 17th up to the middle of the 19th century. It is one of a few creole languages for which a large amount of reliable early data on its morphology is available. It is with reference to these data that B analyses Early Sranan word formation. Morphological processes in pidgin and creole languages are usually disregarded in morphological research because these languages have long been considered as lacking