Linguistic Society of America

On the Definition of Word by Anna Maria Di Sciullo; Edwin Williams
Review by: Mark Aronoff
Language, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 766-770
Published by: Linguistic Society of America
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/414569
Accessed: 10/05/2013 07:20

ZARETSKI, AJZIK. 1930. Di jafetiše lingvistik un jidiš. Di jidiše šprax 21–2.71–6.
ŽIRMUNSKIJ, V. M. 1936. Nacional'nyj jazyk i social'nye dialekty. Leningrad: Xudo-
    žestvennaja literatura.

On the definition of word. By ANNA MARIA DI SCIULLO and EDWIN WILLIAMS.
(Linguistic Inquiry monographs, 14.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987. Pp.
115. Cloth $20.00, paper $8.95.

Reviewed by MARK ARONOFF, *SUNY at Stony Brook*

WORD is a pre-theoretical term and there is thus no expectation that it will
in the end denote anything real. Yet linguists have always assumed that the
intuitive notion does have some scientific value. This slim volume represents
another attempt to arrive at a theoretically useful treatment of a notion 'word'.
The difficulty of the task makes the title of the book a little misleading. The
purpose of this book is really not to define, but rather to sort out three distinct
senses of the word in question: morphological word, syntactic atom, and lexical
entry (or what DS&W call LISTEME). The authors also acknowledge, though
they do not discuss in any detail, another sense—that of phonological word.
They argue that listeme is not a linguistically valuable notion, leaving us with
three distinct senses of the term 'word': morphological, syntactic, and pho-
nological. Thus, while not providing us with a definition, the authors do succeed
in sorting things out, providing at least preliminaries to a definition.

After a two-page abstract, which is very useful in setting the stage, the book
is divided into four chapters, the first on listemes, the second on morphological
words, the third on words as syntactic atoms, and the fourth on nonmorpho-
logical objects.

The first chapter comprises an argument against the position that morphology
is a theory of the lexicon, where the lexicon is conceived of as a list of all the
words in the language. This position has recently been quite influential, and
though it has been criticized repeatedly, it is pernicious and robust enough to
warrant further discussion. DS&W, adopting the Bloomfieldian view of the
lexicon as a list of those exceptional signs which must be memorized, show
that the lexicon must contain complex phrases and that it must not contain
certain words, thus demonstrating that the lexicon does not coincide with the
morphological word.

The second chapter provides part of a theory of morphology. DS&W adopt
Selkirk's phrase-structure theory of morphological structure (1982) and add to
it Williams' by now well-known Right-Head Rule (1981). They deny any prin-
cipled distinction between inflection and derivation, relying instead on the fact
that heads must be external. Certain criticisms of Williams' head theory are
answered by introducing the notion RELATIVIZED HEAD. The largest part of this
chapter is devoted to showing how the argument structure of complex words
is derived. Compounds are distinguished from affixational structures in that
'whereas the head of a compound relates to its non-head by θ-role assignments,
an affixal head relates to its non-head not via θ-role assignment, but via function

composition' (32). However, according to DS&W, this difference is probably accidental.

In Ch. 3, DS&W argue that morphology and syntax are 'different sciences about different objects' (46), though they do share a small, restricted theoretical vocabulary. Words, they say, are syntactic atoms (X^0), and syntactic rules cannot penetrate the X^0 barrier. Rather, they can only have access to the outermost layer of the properties of words. DS&W criticize recent work which allows for interpenetration of syntax and morphology, and provide alternate analyses of such phenomena as noun incorporation and agreement.

Ch. 4 contains two sections: the first concerns syntactic atoms which are nonmorphological, i.e. 'words' which are derived from phrases, and the second deals with coanalysis, cases in which a construction can simultaneously be given two analyses, one syntactic and one morphological.

In Ch. 1, DS&W attempt to divorce the lexicon completely from morphology, not merely in the strong sense, where morphology is understood as a theory of the lexicon (an idea which is surely wrong), but even in the weak sense, where morphology touches on the lexicon in various ways. It seems to me that there are three types of phenomena which cannot be accounted for without having morphology interact with the lexicon. The first is productivity. It is by now well known that certain patterns are more productive than others within exactly the same domain. A good deal of literature exists on the many differences between more and less productive patterns in a single domain (e.g. Aronoff 1983), and there is also some theoretical work (e.g. van Marle 1985). DS&W do not attempt to account for any of the phenomena discussed in this literature. Instead, they suggest that all differences in productivity are illusory. For example, they say that it is unclear that there is any difference in productivity between -*ness* and -*ity*, noting that 'with X-*ic* forms -*ity* is 100 percent productive' (10). Walker 1936 lists 35 X-*ic-ity* forms derived from X-*ic* forms and approximately 1700 X-*ic* forms. Two percent is not 100. Nor are we dealing here with a perfectly productive pattern, since potential words like *metricity* or *forensicity* are highly questionable. I have puzzled over this particular case for years and I still don't know exactly what is going on, but one thing is clear: the authors have preserved their theory at the cost of avoiding contact with the data.

Blocking is another phenomenon which can be understood in terms of the lexicon. As Hofmann 1982 puts it, 'all lexical items block the appearance of exactly paraphrastic expressions' (240). Hofmann 1983 also discusses a large number of cases where a phrase is blocked by a word, and DS&W use such examples to show that blocking is not confined to words. What they cannot deny is that, regardless of the status of the blocked item, the relation is asymmetric, in that the blocking item is in the lexicon. Blocking is probably explainable in terms of general pragmatic principles (Horn 1984) which extend to purely syntactic cases like Avoid Pronoun, but the asymmetric nature of lexical blocking would seem to necessitate a close interplay between the output of rules of syntax and morphology and the lexicon.

Finally and most explicitly, DS&W deny that words are formed from words or stems, adopting instead a morpheme-based theory which avoids access to the lexicon. Booij 1987 contrasts these two general types of theory and shows that the morpheme-based view has certain fundamental weaknesses, the most obvious of which is the inheritance of irregularity, both semantic and phono- logical. Consider the word *antidisestablishmentarianism*. A word-based theory can trace its idiosyncratic church-state meaning to the idiosyncratic meaning of *disestablishment*: '*specif:* the act of a state in sundering the relationships between it and its established church' (Webster's Third, s.v. *disestablishment*). A morpheme-based theory has no such hope, for none of the individual com- ponents of the word, including the root *establish*, is the cause of the idiosyn- crasy. Cases like these, where the semantics of a secondary derivative is de- pendent on the idiosyncratic meaning of a primary derivative, abound: cf. e.g. *institutionalization, transformational, old-maidish*. The phonological argument against a purely morphemic view depends on a parallel phenomenon, the in- herited exceptionality of complex items. For example, speakers who do not lax the initial vowel in *bestial*, making it an exception to trisyllabic laxing, will similarly not lax it in *bestiality*. It will not do to say that *beast* is an exception to trisyllabic laxing, since it does not meet the structural description of the rule. Rather, the complex word *bestial* and its derivatives are exceptional (or are not marked for the rule if it itself is minor).

In short, there are various reasons for believing that there is a close and sometimes delicate interaction between morphology and the lexicon, and a similar interaction for syntax. But this interaction does not contradict the au- thors' basic point, that morphology and the lexicon are distinct. It seems that, in their zeal to make this point, the authors have adopted an exaggerated and untenable position.

In Ch. 2, the discussion of heads is disappointing. Williams' original formal revival of the old observation that English is right-headed, and the theory of heads and lexical relatedness that encoded this observation (Williams 1981), have been subjected to a good deal of criticism, both empirical and theoretical. I had therefore hoped that this chapter would provide some lively discussion. But instead of a defense of the idea that affixes are heads, we are given a weakening or 'relativization' of the 1981 claim. Certain affixes are now treated as heads only with respect to a particular category. The principal use of these relativized heads is in inflection, where a single word often contains a string of affixes of which none can be said to be the head of the word in any sense. DS&W give the Latin word *amabitur* 'he/she will be loved' as an example. They propose that this word be viewed as having two heads—that *bi* is head with respect to future and that *tur* is head with respect to passive. In addition, the verb stem itself must be the head with respect to argument structure. They say that 'there is nothing incoherent or disturbing about this situation' (27). I for one am disturbed on two grounds. First, it is hard to see exactly what is retained of the original claim in an analysis like this. Secondly, the analysis disguises the special nature of inflectional affixes (see below). On the sub- stantive side, the authors retain the claim of right-headedness, but they do not

make clear what the scope of this claim is. Is it meant to be universal? If so, what about languages with both productive prefixes and suffixes, sometimes simultaneously as double exponents—one prefix and one suffix—as in the Modern Hebrew pattern *mi*-CC*a*C-*a* 'place where given activities are under-taken' (e.g. *mispara* 'barber shop', root *spr* 'cut'; *miltaša* 'diamond polishing plant', root *ltš* 'polish')? Austronesian languages are filled with such double exponents. And what about infixes and templates, which also occur in Aus-tronesian and Semitic languages? What about compounds? There are languages like Vietnamese, with both left- and right-headed compounds (Nhan 1982). But the only language besides English whose morphology is discussed in any detail in this book is French, which differs only in compounds, a difference which is explained away quite nicely by the authors.

The authors also temper the original claim that affixes are heads in the same way that heads of compounds are heads. They do this by treating affixational semantics via function composition. This difference in formal treatment would seem to call into question the basic principle that affixes are heads, but DS&W sidestep the problem by pointing to verbs like *seem*, whose semantics can be handled nicely if they are treated as functions rather than as predicates. But this only avoids the real question, which is whether compounding and affixation are structurally the same.

In Ch. 3, the authors defend a strong version of the lexicalist hypothesis, according to which words, including compounds, are internally opaque to all syntax. They exclude all morphology from any interaction with syntax, even inflection, rejecting Anderson's influential view (1982). I am uncomfortable with this rejection. For one thing, DS&W have already shown that inflectional affixes are different from derivational affixes. Thomas-Flinders 1983 has ar-gued, on essentially the same grounds, that inflectional structure is flat and nonrecursive (multiple affixes are not nested), and therefore different from derivation. Further, agreement—the classic case of inflection—must be treated as a distinct phenomenon in DS&W's system. It does not satisfy argument structure, but rather sets conditions on the bearers of thematic roles. The point is that there are well-motivated distinctive properties of inflection which should be faced squarely. DS&W's rejection of the distinction between inflection and derivation, based as it is on a clearly inadequate definition, does not advance the field.

The most interesting section of Ch. 4 is that on coanalysis. It is marred, however, by a weakness which, though pervasive in the book, is clearest here. I will close my review with a short discussion of that weakness.

Massachusetts is the Manhattan of academia: nothing that happens outside is given much notice. One can speculate on the causes, but the phenomenon is undeniable. In this book, it appears as the apparent failure of the authors to have read much of the most exciting morphological work of the last five years. Hoeksema 1985 contains a close critique of Williams' notion of head and a detailed theory of affixes as categorial function. Thomas-Flinders 1983 is a well-argued analysis of the differences between inflection and derivation. Sa-dock 1985 presents a system of coanalysis that closely resembles the one pre-

sented here. None of these studies, all of which are well within the mainstream, is mentioned, let alone discussed, in this book.

This book is clearly written, but it does suffer from an editorial sloppiness uncharacteristic of MIT Press. There are many more typos than I have come to expect from this publisher and, more surprisingly, quite a few stylistic infelicities and misplaced commas. All in all, this is a stimulating book on an important topic, but it is also an unfortunate example of academic parochialism.

REFERENCES

ANDERSON, STEPHEN. 1982. Where's morphology? LI 13.571–612.
ARONOFF, MARK. 1983. Potential words, actual words, productivity, and frequency. Proceedings of the Thirteenth International Congress of Linguists, 163–71.
BOOIJ, GEERT E. 1987. Lexical phonology and the organization of the morphological component. Rules and the lexicon, ed. by Edward Gussman, 43–65. Lublin: Redakcya Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
HOEKSEMA, JACK. 1985. Categorical morphology. New York: Garland.
HOFMANN, THOMAS R. 1982. Lexical blocking. Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, Toyama University 5.239–50.
——. 1983. Lexical blocking, II. Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, Toyama University 6.119–45.
HORN, LAURENCE R. 1984. Toward a new taxonomy for pragmatic inference: Q-based and R-based implicature. Meaning, form and use in context: Linguistic applications, ed. by Deborah Schiffrin, 11–42. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
NHAN, NGO THANH. 1982. The syllabeme and patterns of word formation in Vietnamese. NYU dissertation.
SADOCK, JERROLD M. 1985. Autolexical syntax: A proposal for the treatment of noun incorporation and similar phenomena. Natural Language and Linguistic Theory 3.379–439.
SELKIRK, ELISABETH O. 1982. The syntax of words. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
THOMAS-FLINDERS, TRACY. 1983. Morphological structures. Los Angeles: University of California dissertation.
VAN MARLE, JAAP. 1985. On the paradigmatic dimension of morphological creativity. University of Utrecht dissertation.
WALKER, J. 1936. Walker's Rhyming Dictionary, revised and enlarged by L. H. Dawson. New York: Dutton.
WILLIAMS, EDWIN. 1981. On the notions 'lexically related' and 'head of a word'. LI 12.245–74.

Department of Linguistics   [Received 15 March 1988.]
SUNY at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-4376

Language Socialization Across Cultures. Edited by BAMBI B. SCHIEFFELIN and ELINOR OCHS. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Pp. vii, 274.

Reviewed by WILLIAM A. CORSARO, *Indiana University, Bloomington*

Recently we have seen the beginnings of a movement away from theories that view development as the solo child's mastery of the world on her own terms to a view of socialization as a collective process that occurs in a public rather than a private realm (see Bruner 1986, Corsaro 1988, Harré 1986). From this view the child is not only active, but socially active—a participant through