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FRANK ANSHEN / MARK ARONOFF

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Producing morphologically complex words*

FRANK ANSHEN and MARK ARONOFF

Abstract

Certain morphologically complex words are stored in the mental lexicon, while others are constructed as needed. In producing sentences, speakers simultaneously search their lexicons for needed words, attempt to build the words by rule, and construct them by analogy. A variety of types of evidence, experimental, historical, and statistical, supports these hypotheses.

Morphology is one of the many factors that have been demonstrated to be relevant in lexical processing and lexical storage (Bradley 1980; Cutler 1980, 1983; Lukatela et al. 1980; Mackay 1978; Manelis and Tharp 1977; Taft 1979a, 1979b; Taft and Forster 1975). The simplest morphological question that a psycholinguist can ask is whether a linguist's morphologically complex item, such as *agitation*, is treated by the speaker-hearer as a simple item or whether it is decomposed. While some (for example, Manelis and Tharp) have argued against decomposition, there is a good deal of evidence, direct and indirect, for it. Indeed, certain results make no sense at all if speakers cannot decompose morphologically complex words. For example, we have shown elsewhere (Aronoff and Schvanevelt 1978; Anshen and Aronoff 1981; Aronoff 1983) that speakers can recognize novel English words that are produced by morphological rules and that they can make fine distinctions among the output of these rules, based on their productivity (for example, *reprehensibility* vs. *reprehensibleness*, or *stimulateness* vs. *stimulativity*). None of this can be explained without language users having the capacity for morphological decomposition of some sort. We will show that they use this capacity in the production of morphologically complex words.

Once we admit morphological complexity, we may legitimately ask whether this complexity is reflected in the organization of lexical memory. This question is usually framed in terms of whether morphologically related words are stored together. It is very difficult to find good

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