On the Role of Morphological Adjacency in Stress Shift

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This presentation focuses on stress placement in English derived words with special attention for the adjacency of roots (or stems) and affixes. We appeal to the notion of adjacency introduced by Sato (1990), in whose approach structures consisting of roots and affixes are considered to be nested:

(1)   [b [a [X] c] d]
        where X = root (or stem); a, b, c, d =affixes   (Sato 1990)

In (1), the prefix a and the suffix c are *adjacent* to the root X, while prefix b and suffix d are not. English affixes belong to different types, as illustrated in (2).

(2)   position a: in-, con-, per-,   …etc.
        position b: un-, non-, re-, …etc.
        position c: -ity, -al, -ion, -ation, -able, ... etc.
        position d: -ness, -dom, -hood, -ism, …etc.

Ii is possible that two affixes occur in the same position, as in [able-ity] (both c affixes). A morphological position may also remain empty, marked as [φ]. Representations of morphological structure using this "templatic" approach make a number of surprising predictions. Many phonological rules apply when they are directly adjacent to X, but if an empty position intervenes it acts like a "barrier" on the application of phonological rules. Consider, for instance, the relation between affixation and assimilation. The [n] of the prefix in- (position a) assimilates to any following consonant (e.g., impossible, irregular, iNcoherent), while the [n] of un- (position b) does not (unknown, unnecessary, with geminate [nn], and unpopular, without assimilation). Other analyses of this phenomenon (Szpyra 1989,etc.) are less straightforward.

The same approach is useful to distinguish between stress-neutral and stress-sensitive affixes. Consider the following words:

(3)   a.   PW   b.   PW   PW
                  ╱   ╲   │   │
                 │   │   │   │
            (definite   ive)PW   (définite)PW (ness)PW
              (stress shift)   (no stress shift)

The presence vs. absence of stress shift can also be straightforwardly accounted for in the "templatic" analysis: –ness (class d) is preceded by an empty morphological position, while –ive (class c) is not. Only if the two morphological units are adjacent, is it possible to regard them as one phonological word, with single, shifted stress. Other analyses of this phenomenon weaken our views of the phonology-morphology in important ways.

The morphological "template" approach accounts for the right ordering of affixes (decis-ive-ness), while at least some classic "ordering paradoxes" are solved (e.g., in read-able-ity: both –able and –ity are position c affixes).

We conclude that this approach can relate several seemingly unrelated facts about assimilation, stress shift and the ordering of affixes in English morphology in a natural way.