

A quoi ça sert la langue
Mark Aronoff
Stony Brook University, USA

Echoing Edith Piaf's last song, "A quoi ça sert l'amour" ['what's the point of love'], we may equally ask "A quoi ça sert la langue?" The field of linguistics has been dominated since Piaf's time by two answers rooted in propositional thinking: language is for thought and language is for communicating information. Both points of view are misguided. First, and most importantly, it is misguided to assume that any evolutionary trait has any single purpose beyond survival and reproduction of the human species. Second, and more obviously, language has many clear purposes besides thought and communication. Earlier in the century, several prominent scholars showed that language served a variety of central human traits outside propositional logic. Bronisław Malinowski (1923) introduced the notion of phatic communion (often misconstrued as 'phatic communication'), Jan Huizinga (1938) emphasized the importance of play in *Homo Ludens* (1938), and J. L. Austin, in *How to Do Things with Words* (1955), showed how language is used for many things beyond logical assertion. I will show how word-formation patterns reflect these other non-propositional aspects of language.

Prefixes, scalarity and the internal structure of degree predicates

Antonio Fábregas

Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway

In Spanish, a subset of locative prefixes, generally denoting up-down or inside-outside relations, double as degree prefixes with adjectives and verbs (1). There are similar patterns in other European languages.

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|-----|----|---|-----|--|
| (1) | a. | sobre-volar
over-fly
'to fly over X' | vs. | sobre-alimentar
over-feed
'to feed more than one should' |
| | b. | sub-cutáneo
sub-cutaneous
'subcutaneous' | vs. | sub-estándar
sub-standard
'inferior to the standard' |
| | c. | extra-uterino
extra-uterine
'of outside the uterus' | vs. | extra-fino
extra-thin
'extremely thin' |

This use is understudied and simply subsumed under a general label of 'adverbial prexiation' (DiSciullo 1997), but has several puzzling properties: among others, (i) unlike real degree operators, the presence of the prefix does not block other types of degree modification (2); (ii) this meaning presupposes the existence of other non-locative readings of the prefixes in other contexts, as in (3); (iii) only prepositional prefixes, never other types even if they have a locative meaning (Fábregas 2024), allow this use (4).

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| (2) | a. | muy extra-fino
very extra-thin | | |
| | b. | *muy bastante fino
very quite thin | | |
| (3) | | extra-vagante
extra-vagant | | |
| (4) | a. | exo-esqueleto
exo-skeleton | | |
| | b. | #exo-fino
exo-thin
Intended: 'beyond thin' | | |

In this talk, I will argue that only prefixes corresponding to prepositional structures can participate in this use because the use involves an adjunction structure on a scalar component that the base already introduces. Instead of binding a degree variable, the prefix restricts the scale to values above (outside) or below some point, which explains its compatibility with degree operators. This adjunction is only possible when the conceptual information of the prefix is not strictly spatial any longer.

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Towards a diasystematic construction morphology (DiaCxM)

Gerhard B van Huyssteen

North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

At the precursor event of the Word-Formation Theories conference, and in Štekauer & Lieber's *Handbook of Word-Formation* from the same year (2005), constructionist approaches to morphology was represented only by David Tuggy's (2005) explication in terms of cognitive grammar (Langacker 2008). Over the past twenty years though, the scene changed quite dramatically. The publication of Geert Booij's seminal *Construction Morphology* (CxM) in 2010 set the agenda for an ever-increasing interest in the study of morphological constructions within the broader construction grammar (CxG) framework. For example, Booij (2025) presents a comprehensive list of publications and presentations "in which concepts of [CxM] are discussed and/or used in the description of specific languages," ranging from only two in 2002 (e.g., Booij 2002), to ninety in 2024.

One of the developments in construction grammar that has gained significant traction over the past few years, is diasystematic construction grammar (DiaCxG) (Höder 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2018, 2019). This sub-theory of CxG deals specifically with language contact phenomena in multilingual speech communities. DiaCxG's central thesis is that multilingual speakers have both language-specific constructions (a.k.a. idioconstructions; idiocxns) and language-unspecific constructions (a.k.a. diaconstructions; diacxns) in their linguistic repertoire. Idiocxns are specific (i.e., idiosyncratic) to a particular language, while diacxns capture shared attributes of idiocxns that are (formally) similar across two or more languages. While morphological contact phenomena have enjoyed rather extensive attention in the morphological literature at large (see for example Müller et al. 2015, 1561–1760), far less consideration has been given to it in CxM and DiaCxM. For example, only five publications in Booij (2025) contain the search term *contact* in their titles, while only two publication in Höder (2025) are about morphological constructions, viz. Van Goethem and Hendrikx (2021); Hendrikx and Van Goethem (2024). The overarching objective of this presentation is to explore CxM, DiaCxG, and other closely-related (sub-)theories – specifically relational morphology (Jackendoff and Audring 2020), and the entrenchment-and-conventionalisation model (Schmid 2023) – as appropriate for the description and explanation of morphological contact phenomena.

The presentation will commence with a concise historical overview of morphology within the general cognitive linguistic endeavour, before succinctly elucidating the most important convergent and divergent tenets of the (sub-)theories mentioned above. I will then expound diasystematic construction morphology (DiaCxM) as a viable framework to describe and explain bi-/multilingualism as an agent of morphological change. Issues like competition, contamination, and loan morphology will be addressed by using mainly examples from languages in close contact with English.

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Evaluative morphology as a window on categorization

Francesca Masini

Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, Italy

Evaluative strategies, including morphological ones, encode a deviation from a standard acting along different dimensions and giving rise to different evaluative functions. The latter, according to Grandi & Körtvélyessy (2015), are classified by two intersecting parameters: (i) descriptive perspective (e.g., diminution, augmentation) vs. qualitative perspective (e.g., intensification, contempt); (ii) positive pole (e.g., augmentation, intensification) vs. negative pole (e.g., diminution, contempt).

Whereas some functions like diminution, augmentation and intensification have been extensively studied (see, a.m.o., Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 1994; Jurafsky 1996; Grandi 2002; Körtvélyessy & Štekauer 2011; Rainer 2015; Napoli & Ravetto 2017), other functions—such as approximation or contempt have been less explored until recently (e.g., Masini, Norde & Van Goethem 2023; Sánchez Fajardo 2022).

One under-investigated function is prototypicality or authenticity, which Grandi & Körtvélyessy (2015) place in the qualitative positive section (like intensification). In my talk I will focus on this function, by exploring its scope and use in relation to approximation and intensification both intra- and cross-linguistically, and I will show its relevance for categorization as a cognitive process.

A close-up, quantitative look at morphotactic variability: Lessons for morphological theory and typology

Andrea D. Sims

The Ohio State University, USA

Research on morphotactic aspects of affix combinability has focused in recent years on learning biases and cognitive processing efficiency as sources of ordering restrictions, often with the goal of accounting for cross-linguistic tendencies. However, this work tends to overlook language-internal variability in the strictness of affix ordering restrictions. In this talk I place such variability at the center of attention. I show via large-scale, quantitative investigations of derivational affix ordering in English and Russian and compound constituent ordering in Vietnamese that ordering variability is of substantial importance for modeling the role of memory structure in morphological generalization. I conclude that while the shift in linguistic typology towards processing-based explanation offers important insights, a close-up look at language-internal morphotactic variability offers a needed corrective to the overly simplified universalism found in much of this work.

