

Re-examining the interaction of sound-change and analogy from an implicational word-and-paradigm perspective (talk, general session)

Many textbook and handbook accounts of the interaction between morphologically disruptive sound change and order-restoring analogy focus, often exclusively, on the emergence of (stem) allomorphy through conditioned sound change, followed by analogical leveling. Standard examples include Latin rhoticism (*honos–honōris* → *honor–honōris*) and Germanic Verner's Law alternations (OE *cēosan–coren* → ModE *choose–chosen*). Hock makes explicit a view that is implied in many other accounts (e.g. Trask 1996:107–111) when he writes that the very notion of interaction between sound changes that give rise to morphological irregularity and analogical changes that restore regularity "applies only to the relationship between sound change and leveling" (1986:171). This contrasts sharply with neogrammarian accounts of this interaction (e.g. Paul 1886:184–190), which put much more emphasis on sound changes that eliminate allomorphy across inflection classes in one part of a paradigm, thereby undermining the usefulness of the affected forms for predicting other forms in the paradigm. A classic example here is the *-os* → *-us* change in Latin that resulted in the 2nd and 4th declensions becoming identical in the nominative singular, so that it was no longer possible to tell from that basic form which of the two declensions a noun belonged to. In such cases, the analogical reaction consists of items moving from one inflectional class to another and may ultimately result in a complete collapse into a single class.

I argue, on multiple grounds, for a return to something closer to the neogrammarian understanding of the interaction of sound change and analogy, which is also in line with current implicational word-and-paradigm approaches to inflection (Blevins, Ackerman & Malouf 2019). First of all, accounts that focus on the leveling of allomorphic alternations tacitly accept and reinforce the notion of a universal bias against (stem) allomorphy that is supposedly a major motivation for analogical change, but a growing body of work questions the existence of such a bias (Fertig 2016). Secondly, whereas analogical leveling of stem alternations is routinely discussed in connection with the sound changes that originally gave rise to those alternations – even if many centuries or even millenia separate the sound changes from the analogical "reaction" – accounts of lexical transfer of items among inflection-classes and collapse of class distinctions often make no mention of relevant earlier sound changes. This is apparently based on assumptions about morphology that deny the significance of implicational paradigmatic patterns. If, however, we take seriously Paul's principle that "one word can be subject to analogical influence from another in its inflection only if it [already] corresponds to the other word in the formation of one or more forms" (1886:95), then certain sound changes must be regarded as necessary precursors for attested analogical changes.

The regularization of originally strong verbs in Germanic languages, especially English, is one major example where the relevance of sound changes that disrupted the predictive value of key forms in the paradigm is rarely mentioned. In fact, there is a widespread belief that regularization of strong verbs has been a pervasive tendency throughout the history of English (Trask 1996:122; Lieberman 2007). Using data from the *Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English*, the *Middle English Dictionary*, and a database derived from the late fourteenth-century Devonshire text *Sir Firumbras*, I present a detailed look at the collapse of the Old English system of class-distinctive present-tense and infinitive forms and the geographical correlation between these phonological developments and the onset of regularization of originally strong verbs in different dialects of early and later Middle English.

References

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