

Stable interspersion: why indexation affixes don't care too much about the layered principle.

Following a functional view of morpheme order (Bybee 1985, Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994), derivational and lexical affixes tend to appear closer to the stem and furthermore fuse with it, since they are highly relevant for the meaning of the stem. Inflection, on the other hand, does not change its meaning significantly, and therefore appears more likely at the periphery of the word. This cross-linguistic ordering of morphemes has been referred to as 'layered morphology' and considered to be typologically very common. The case where less relevant affixes appear closer to the stem would override this principle, and diachronically, reordering or externalization of these affixes is a likely outcome. Examples of externalization of less relevant affixes are found in Lithuanian and Pengo (Dravidian).

(1) Externalization in Lithuanian (Haspelmath 1993:287): The reflexive affix is more relevant to the meaning of the stem than the indexation affix.

a. Standard variety
dirb-uo-s
 work-1sg-REFL
 "I work for myself"

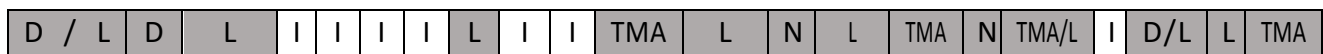
b. Dialectal variant
meldži-uo-si-u
 pray-1sg-REFL-1sg
 "I am praying"

(2) Reordering in Pengo (Dravidian) (Bybee 1985:40-41): The perfective affix is more relevant to the meaning of the stem than the indexation affix.

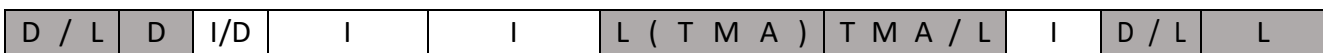
a. Older form
hurt-ay-na
 see-2-PERF
 "You see."

b. Newer form
hurt-an-ay
 see-PERF-2
 "You see."

However, in languages with a high degree of synthesis, orders that go against the layered principle are more common. Quite unexpectedly, indexation, which is considered least relevant to the meaning of the stem, is not less likely to be interspersed between other categories than tense, mood and aspect. A prominent example are Athabaskan languages, where affixes indexing number, person and specificity have retained their position between other types of affixes (Rice 2000, Denk 2019). The comparison of morpheme positions between Ahtna (more conservative affix order) and Navajo (more innovative) shows this stable interspersion of less relevant indexation affixes (white) between more relevant affixes (darker)¹.



Ahtna verbal morpheme positions



Navajo verbal morpheme positions

¹ Abbreviations: L(lexical), I(ndexation), T(ense)M(ood)A(spect), N(egative), D(erivational) morphemes.

Besides showing how indexation affixes in Athabaskan have not undergone much externalization and reordering, we investigate the order of aspect, tense, mood, and indexation in a typological survey of 30 genetically and geographically distant languages with more than seven verbal affix positions. The results show that positions that index participants are the 'odd one out'; they disobey the layered principle more than positions expressing aspect, tense and mood. The diachronic and synchronic evidence suggests that the order of indexation is more stable than the order of tense, mood aspect. The talk proposes explanation for the higher stability of indexation, one being higher type frequency than the other categories.

References

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