(tum diddy tum tum) ... LNGS 3025:

Morphology

Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney

Lecturer:  Mark Donohue (room Transient 243B; phone 9351 7516; email: donohue@sultry.arts.usyd.edu.au)

Tutor:  probly me as well

Unit worth:  8 credit points

Prerequisites:  LNGS 2001 (Phonetics and Phonology)

Textbooks:  Well, the official textbook is:


It’s all there, I guess, but just a pretty boring writing style, and not much in the way of examples to illustrate his points. It’s more of a reference / background reading sort of text, I guess. You won’t regret owning it ($35), but, really, I reckon that, between the section in Fromkin on morphology, and some eager note-taking, you’d probably be right:


Other readings will be suggested in lectures, but if you can get hold of a copy of:


it’s really good, and very helpful (albeit massively pretheoretical; very much a how-to guide, and so timelessly useful). Hard to find your way around, but well worth it. Two copies in the library.

Lectures:  Monday at 10 - 12 pm, somewhere. I, for one, can’t do two hours straight, so we’ll have some kinda break in the middle there.

Web:  http://www.sultry.arts.usyd.edu.au/ling/study/ling324.htm

Worth a look:  http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/rbeard/

discusses his ideas on morphology, not easy, but definitely insightful.

Tutorials:  once per week, to be arranged; I vote for either Wednesday or Thursday, or else later on Monday

1. Goals

Well, the handbook says that this one’s about a whole heap of things. To quote it all, we’re meant to cover a mass of stuff. Read it for yourself:

This unit of study covers the following issues: morphological typology and classifications; formal properties of morphological phenomena: concatenative morphology, affixation; nonconcatenative morphology: root and pattern morphology, reduplication, truncations, hypocoristic formation; formal
representation of morphological processes; functional aspects of morphology categories, grammatical relations, classification system; current models of morphology.

Sounds terrifying. I mean, what on earth is “nonconcatenative morphology” anyway? (or concatenative, for that matter) I don’t know. We’d better have some readings to discuss, I reckon, then we’ll all get on better. Oh, and hypocoristics: definitely not, not my field at all (though I can pronounce it [haɪpəkəˈrɪstɪks], and do know what they are). Ditto truncations. Anyhow, here’s my little free-association about what I’d like to run over in the latter half of 2000 in this course:

Morphology is about the organisation of words in languages in terms of meaning-carrying units.

That’s all very neat, but there’s a mass of assumptions in there that need to be addressed, like:

- what’s a word?
- whatcha mean by ‘organisation’?
- how do you put different morphemes together?
- what if you have more than just two things coming together in one word?
- are there different kinds of morphemes?
- do you put them together, and if not, …
- just what is going on anyway?

We’ll look at the basic principles of discovery of morphemes, then have a tour of the structural and typological variation found in some different languages. And then mess with our heads by looking at different ways of looking at morphology, formally.

I guess we could say that, by doing this course, we’ll

- learn about search-and-detection procedures for morphemes; then
- learn what sort of ways morphology can appear, and
- what sort of things morphology can mark, and finally
- learn alternative ways to think about morphology

That seems reasonable. We’ll start by discussing some aspects of English for a grounding, and then go on to a range of other (harder!) languages to develop a feel for the kind of variation that you need to be able to account for.

2. Assessment

Morphology is best done by practice, and so there’ll be lots of take-home problems, which should be completed individually. Problems for group solution will come in the tutorials, and walked through in class.

---

1 Since writing that, a friend explained it to me.
If you hand in an assignment late, and still want to get a mark, you will have to firstly show good reason why you couldn’t hand it in on time, and then do a catch-up assignment in its place. Talk to me before it becomes late, that’s far and away the best thing to do, then we can work something out that doesn’t penalise you, or hassle me. Which surely is what it’s all really about.

Here’s a guide to how the assessment can go, though I’m open to suggestions.

1. **5 Moderate Problem Sets (10% each for a total of 50%)**
   
   Five topical problem sets will be assigned. They must be handed in within one week of being assigned; this shouldn’t be a hassle, as they won’t be monsters. Four of these come before the mid-term break, and one after; the dates are on the course calendar. Nothing due to be done over the break.

2. **1 Quiz (10%)**
   
   This is just before the mid-term break, to check up on everyone’s attention span so far, and to see if we’re all happy with terminology. It’ll be in a tute time.

3. **1 Major Problem Set (30%), or Essay-Like Thing**
   
   Bigger and better, calling on the application of most of the skills and knowledge that has been learned in the course. This assignment will be harder, and requires the student to provide argumentation to back up the solutions.

   If you wish, you can, instead of this problem set, write a ± 2000-word essay on something relevant to the course (provided the topic has been discussed with me by 31/10) at the latest. This could be either an essay on something of theoretical confusion that you’ve been bothered by (not after a conclusion or solution really, just your musings), or the application of more savvy reasoning to a set of data you’ve either found in some descriptive work on a language, or which we’ve talked about and I’ve directed you to. Whatever, it’s due mid-November-ish.

4. **Class Participation (10%)**
   
   I know, I know, it’s all very horrid knowing that there’s nothing, objectively, you can do to influence this one, but it’ll at least encourage you to turn up. That’s gotta be a good thing, no? If you like, we could make the class presentation thingy assessed, if you like, to make it feel like you’ve got more input into this part of the assessment, but that strikes me as just mega-stressful. Anyhow, your choice.

   Here’s another idea: you could dump up to, say, 10% of your 30% assessment thing in here, and have your presentation more assessable. Fair? (optional). Alternatively, and rather smartly, you could do a presentation, and have that lead into an essay topic. Anyhow, think about it and don’t forget to discuss the options with me. Like I said, these’re guidelines, and a reasonable schema that redistributes the marks in other ways is fine by me. We can either redo the whole thing, or negotiate person-by-person.

### 3. Syllabus

The following is a rough guide to the material that we’ll be covering, and (roughly) when:

**Weeks 1 and 2: July 10th and 17th**

Overview: basic concepts, terminology. Morphology versus: phonology; syntax; the lexicon. Form and meaning. The notion of ‘word’. Learning to search for morphemes.
Weeks 3 and 4: July 24th and 31st
Typology of morphological structures, functional kinds of morpheme: derivational or inflectional. Sub-morphemes? when to stop. Productivity, Mirror Principle, constituency

Weeks 5 and 6: August 7th and 14th

Weeks 7 and 8: August 21st and 28th

Week 9  September 4th
Grammatical features, inflectional systems, realisational versus incremental theories of morphology.

Other reading

Harder reading