

PAPER 6 (DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS) ***CONDITIONING OF ALLOMORPHS***

PHONOLOGICAL CONDITIONING

In the case of the /s/, /z/, and /z/ allomorphs of the plural morphemes in cats, dogs, and judges, the /s/ occurs after a /t/, the /z/ after a /g/, and the /z/ after a /j/. When the distribution of the various allomorphs can be stated in terms of their phonemic environments, the allomorphs are said to be phonologically conditioned. We can economically explain the distribution of the allomorphs of not only the English "plural" but also the English "possessive" (cat's) and the verb "third person" (takes) morphemes at the same time. In general, these allomorphs are all phonologically conditioned in addition to being homophones. The usual allomorphs of the "English plural", "possessive", and "third person" morphemes are /z/, which occurs after /ssczj/ (or after sibilants), /s/, which occurs after the remaining voiceless consonants, and /z/, which occurs elsewhere. When the "plural" morpheme is added to church /c rc/, the result is /c rc z/, when the possessive morpheme is added to snake /sneyk/, the result is /sneyks/, and when the third person morpheme is added to beg /beg/, the result is /begz/.

In another pattern of phonological conditioning the usual allomorphs of the English "past tense" and "past participle" morphemes which occur with verbs, for example in baked, are /d/, which occurs after /td/, /t/ which occurs after the remaining voiceless consonants, and /d/, which occurs elsewhere. Phonological conditioning appears to be the most general and productive kind of conditioning of morphemic variants in languages.

MORPHOLOGICAL CONDITIONING OF ALLOMORPHS

In pairs such as man-men, child-children, and deer-deer, in which the second item can be said to contain the "plural" morpheme, we cannot state the variation, if any, between the two forms in terms of phonetic environment. Instead we must refer to the morphemes "man", "child" and "deer", or alternatively, to their phonemic shapes (/ma n/, /caɪld/ and /dɪr/), and specify the allomorph of the "plural" morpheme separately for each. This kind of variation among allomorphs is called morphological conditioning. The morphologically conditioned allomorphs are regarded as irregular in contrast with the phonologically conditioned allomorphs, which are regarded as regular. Men, children and deer are therefore irregular English plurals, just as are alumni, criteria, mice, women, oxen, and strata. The "past tense" morpheme also has its irregular allomorphs, as in drank, brought, swam, was, had, put, took, fled, built and so on; likewise, the past participle morpheme has irregular allomorphs, as in drunk, brought, swum, been, broken, stood, put and so on.