Towards an Integrated Cognitive-Linguistic Theory
of Morphology and Morphological Change

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Over the past 25 years, Cognitive Linguistics has developed a sophisticated analytical apparatus that describes language as fundamentally symbolic in nature (e.g. Langacker 1987). Although language, on this view, is conceived of as a structured inventory of form-meaning pairings at various levels of abstraction rather than an interplay of mutually independent "modules", some constituent elements of language are still less well-studied than others. For example, phenomena in the domain of morphology in general and word-formation in particular can be considered a rather neglected area of Cognitive-Linguistic research (cf. e.g. Onysko & Michel 2010). It is only recently that morphological concerns have come to the centre of attention in a number of synchronic Cognitive-Linguistic and constructionist analyses.

In order to develop a coherent Cognitive-Linguistic theory of morphology, however, the fundamentally diachronic nature of language (e.g. Bybee 2010) has to be taken into account. This is especially the case given that diachronic changes in both inflectional morphology and word-formation allow for valuable insights as to the conceptual dimension and cognitive basis of language.

In this paper, we argue that important findings from different theoretical frameworks in morphological research such as Natural Morphology, Economy Theory, and Optimality Theory can be integrated into a Cognitive-Linguistic theory of morphology and morphological change (cf. also Gaeta 2005). The framework we propose draws on basic assumptions of both Cognitive Linguistics and the complex adaptive system (CAS) approach that has been adopted in much of recent Cognitive-Functional research (e.g. Beckner et al. 2009, Bybee 2010).

On this view, accounting for the phenomena of lexicalization and grammaticalization belongs to the major challenges in the study of diachronic morphology. Despite their important differences, both processes can be seen as complementing each other (e.g. Wischer 2000), sustaining the communicative functions of language by means of constant re-organization and adaptation to both language-internal and extra-linguistic processes of change. This view ties in in directly with a perspective on language as a CAS, whose emergent structure develops out of the dynamic interaction of a multiplicity of factors on different levels of analysis.

With the example of adjectival word-formation in German, namely, derivatives in *-bar* and *-lich*, we will illustrate the viability of our approach on the basis of both qualitative and quantitative studies of diachronic corpora. Crucially, our results lend support to a CAS view of language and make a case for "the semanticization of word-formation analysis" (Ungerer 2007). Thereby our approach remains true to the "primacy of semantics in linguistic analysis" (Geeraerts 1997) emphasized by Cognitive Linguistics and at the same time does justice to previously neglected domains of Cognitive-Linguistic research.

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