**Book Review**

Alexander Tokar
# INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH MORPHOLOGY
Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012

# Vladimir Ž. Jovanović

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

The textbook titled *Introduction to English Morphology* by Alexander Tokar, a German scholar affiliated to various universities, and published by one of the most reputable German publishers in a series of related textbooks, is among the few that directly address this domain of English linguistics and offer an introductory reading or a companion for one of the core disciplines of language study, the subdiscipline of linguistics named morphology. As such, it necessarily deals with some of the basic notions pertaining to the study of word structure, but the book in its volume and content presents more than the title suggests.

This general overview of English morphology is contained in a book of around 250 pages, including around 120 references and the subject index. The text has been structured within six major and lengthy chapters, each with five or more subsections treating specific sub-topics. As is customary elsewhere, the first three chapters are dedicated to outlining the subject of morphology and defining the basic concepts relative and relevant to word and lexeme structure. A particular emphasis on the semantic aspects of the constituent elements can be noticed in the text which abounds in lexical illustrations. The contextualized examples were sourced from authentic and quality online dictionaries such as the well-established *OED* and *Merriam-Webster*, the two most important language corpora, as well as the internet platforms and sites. The next two chapters tackle the segment of morphology known as word or lexeme-formation, focusing on the important problem of productivity with the formative processes and mechanisms. The last section of the textbook is concerned with inflectional morphology and the grammatical categories of significance to the open lexical categories. A particular asset of the text is the fact that each chapter is accompanied with a segment of well-devised exercises and an instruction for further reading providing sources for elaboration on the concepts covered in the pertinent chapter.

The book was written in a manner and style approachable to many readers, both the students in the early stages of studying English linguistics and the professionals well-acquainted with the subject alike. The scope of the students potentially interested in this reading may encompass the students at both B.A. and M.A. levels of English studies. This

was made possible through formulating the text as both a primer in English morphology, covering the basic notions of the study, and a more advanced textual matter discussing more complex and controversial issues of the morphological theory. In most cases, the author provides a solid argumentation for either upholding or rejecting some of the proposed theoretical constructs by the contemporary scholars in the field. The question is whether the points considered in the more sophisticated discussions are of any immediate concern to the students of an introductory morphology course, and how the clear delineation between the two levels is to be maintained throughout the text in a satisfactory fashion.

A fairly strong point on which the book rests is the fact that is has provided a consistent and encompassing treatment of one of the fundamental levels of language organization, namely the segment of the language system that is between phoneme and phrase. In this effort, the author strove to ensure that each of the many phenomena and concepts therein should be accounted for in a sustainable and well-argued manner, forming an intricate yet attainable system of morphological explanations. According to the words of the author himself in the Preface to the book, the system presented was influenced by and based on the works by M. Haspelmath (2011), I. Mel'čuk (1968), V. Plungian (2000), among others, which announces a modern and somewhat unorthodox view of some of the key notions that morphology is composed of.

One of the indubitably favourable characteristics of the textbook is the author's understanding of certain crucial bearings in the study of morphology, primarily the preponderance of the phonological factor in morphology over the orthographic one when it comes to morpheme identification. Besides, Tokar has exhibited a considerable verbal skill in expounding the discipline's core notions, which is supported by an accurate selection of specific instantiations. Although A. Tokar endeavoured to offer a more contemporary view of morphology and incorporate some of the idiosyncratic approaches to theoretical problems of morphology, there seem to be numerous aspects and a number of points where the author dissents from the mainstays of morphology, which may be problematic for the beginners in morphology who would continue reading other sources from the literature. Moreover, a more convincing case for a particular choice in terminology or argumentative support seem to be lacking. The points the author mentions as departure from other introductory books in morphology need not be regarded as a problem, at least not as much as the departures from some well-established facts in the study itself.

Firstly, the author seems to be disinclined to acknowledge the concept of **combining form**, one of the significant terms in morphological analysis which implies a bound form of foreign origin with root qualities, present in many important works, e.g. Bauer, et al. (2013), Carstairs-McCarty (2002), Haspelmath (2010), Kastovsky (2000), and Plag (2003), to name but a few. In his approach, Tokar (2012: 53) assumes that morphs that cannot occur in isolation are to be treated as affixes and even "rejects the categorical analysis of -*logy* of *morphology* as a root*." Opposed to this attitude, an appreciable number of morphologists consider combining forms as a 'viable' structural unit, as* "[…] this type is on the increase in all European languages, […]  and in view of the semantic parallels with native compound patterns" (Kastovsky, 2011: 326). Thus, a thorough treatment accompanied by a list of these bound roots (Jovanović, 2008) within a textbook may prove beneficial or even indispensable for proficiency in word/lexeme structure analysis with English students. This sounds even more germane in perspective, particularly when the following words are taken into consideration: "Specialized and technical terminology, which generally involve

the use of elements borrowed from Latin and Greek, are the most frequent sites of vocabulary innovation." (Denning, et al. 2007 :8)

On the other hand, it may be problematic to present to the student the term **submorph** (Tokar, 2012: 44–46, 51) with reference to structural entities which need not be free, but the semantic content of which cannot be disputed. It is with the item *histor-y* that the author exemplifies the idea of submorphs specifying that neither of the parts is with meaning since only together they should yield whatever meaning they produce. However, this would imply that *histor-* as such would be devoid of any content as it enters other combinations with other affixal forms, which themselves would be meaningless according to Tokar's interpretation. Or rather, they would have meaning only when combined with free morphs such as *modesty*. Since *histor-* occurs in *historic*, *historical*, *historically*, and even *historize*, a rare verb from OED, not to forget the compound *historico-political*, it could be rightfully claimed that it is not devoid of stable semantic content even in its bound form. The term submorph is perhaps better reserved for semantically 'empty' morphs, such as the interfixes or stem extensions *-o-* and *-r-*, respectively. Possibly more objectionable should be the criterion used for the determination of the root in the said example, where the part *histor-* is chosen as the root, now that the criterion of boundedness cannot be applied, but only "because the submorph *histor-* is longer than the submorph *-y*: whereas the latter is made up of only one sound /ɪ/, the former consists of six sounds: /ˈhɪstər/" (Tokar, 2012: 51). Upon the same logic, the item *edible* would have its root in *-ible*, *osseous* in *-eous*, and *ineffable* in *-able*.

Thirdly, judging by the designations placed by A. Tokar on some of the instances from the English language system, more precisely **the lexicon**, there should be no distinction between whatever is considered a **lexeme**, such as ᵥ KICK, and an item such as *to kick the bucket*. In the view of the author, "[…] it makes sense to regard idiomatic phrases and sentences as lexemes as well" (Tokar, 2012: 64). Disregarding the somewhat inexact delineation among the notions of lexeme, word and lex in the conceptual apparatus of the author at this point, it could be argued that the lexicon of a language is not composed only of lexemes and that the units with unified meaning and complex lexical structure are more commonly termed either **lexical items** or **listemes** (Di Sciullo & Williams, 1987: 3) in the vast majority of the most influential books, Cf. Bauer, et al., (2013: 12), Carstairs-McCarty (2002: 13), Spencer, (1991: 178), etc. Therefore, the readers would be perhaps better instructed with the explanation that all the lexical items in the lexicon need not be lexemes.

Finally, a terminological inconsistency that should have been avoided to continue an otherwise comprehensive exposition of lexeme-building concerns the concept of **apophony**. Tokar's definition of the phenomenon as "any modification of the lex of an input lexeme that does not qualify as an instance of segmental affixation" (Tokar, 2012: 143) appears overly general. Bearing in mind that **apophony** (Bauer, et al., 2013: 20) or **ablaut** should be taken as 'a vowel change that gives a word new grammatical functions' (Crystal, 2003: 420), the examples with only primary stress shifting supplied by the author for the purpose of demonstrating apophony *to increase* /ɪnˈkriːs/ > *an increase* /ˈɪnkriːs/ and *to insult* /ɪnˈsʌlt/ > *an insult* /ˈɪnsʌlt/ do not do justice to this linguistic feature.

In conclusion, this textbook is a very encompassing treatment of the major concepts and theoretical tenets of the study of word structure, which includes a critical consideration of some of the more marginal or expert-specific issues (as on page 50). It presents a proper repository of real-life, contemporary, and classic examples of lexeme and word structure from the best sources. This, among other things, may prove a real asset to many students of English in their efforts to deal with the language at this level of organization. At certain

points, the text is very condensed and mindful, proffering a highly usable take on the intrinsic concepts in morphology, and on the others, through a survey of different approaches to word/lexeme structure, it manifests a subtle sway from morpheme-based to lexeme-based morphology, favouring the latter. And yet, although the noticeable tendency to develop a systematic treatment of all the morphological phenomena could be appreciated, sometimes the treatment lacks the proper rationale for some of the options, with no sufficient motivation for the choices made, particularly the ones which go against the established trends in the study of morphology.

REFERENCES

Bauer, L., Lieber, R. & Plag, I, (2013). *The Oxford Reference Guide to English Morphology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Carstairs-McCarthy, A. (2002). *An introduction to English morphology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, 2nd edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Denning, K., Kessler, B., & Leben, W. R. (2007). English vocabulary elements. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Di Sciullo, A. M., & Williams, E. (1987). *On the definition of word*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Haspelmath, M. (2011). The indeterminacy of word segmentation and the nature of morphology and syntax, *Folia Linguistica* 45/1, 31-80.
Haspelmath, M. & A. Sims (2010). *Understanding Morphology*. Second edition. London: Hodder Education.
Jovanović, V. Ž. (2008). *English Morphology: a coursebook*. Niš: Faculty of Philosophy.
Kastovsky, D. (2000). Words and Word-formation: Morphology in the OED, in L. Muggleston (Ed.). *Lexicography and the OED. Pioneers in the Untrodden* Forest, 110–125. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Kastovsky, D. (2011). Diachronic perspectives. In Lieber, R. & Štekauer, P. (Eds.). *The Oxford Heandbook of Compounding*, 323–340. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Mel'čuk, I. (1968). The structure of linguistic signs and formal-semantic relations between them, *The Russian Language in the Meaning-Text Perspective*, I. Mel'čuk (1995). Moscow/Vienna: Wiener Slawistischer Almanach. 425–441.
Plungian, V. (2000). *Obščaja Morfologija* [*General Morphology*]. Moscow: EditorialURSS.
Spencer, A. (1991). *Morphological theory: An introduction to word structure in generative grammar*. London: Basil Blackwell.
Tokar, A. (2012). *Introduction to English Morphology*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.