

Société de Linguistique de Paris
École Pratique des Hautes Études, IV^e section
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La séance aura lieu à l'ÉCOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE, 45 RUE D'ULM
75005 PARIS

Salle des Actes (suivre affichage)

Séance du 11 décembre 2010
(17h - 19h)

Words and their complexity

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A key notion in understanding language is 'possible word'. While we find words (lexemes) which are internally homogeneous and externally consistent, we find others with splits in their internal structure and inconsistencies in their external behaviour. I begin by exploring the characteristics of the most straightforward lexemes, adopting the approach of Canonical Typology. In this approach, we push our definitions to the logical limit, in order to establish a point in the theoretical space from which we can calibrate the real examples we find. By defining canonical inflection, we can schematize the interesting phenomena which deviate from this idealization, including suppletion, syncretism, deponency and defectiveness. We can then look at the different ways in which lexemes are 'split'. Consider the verb *aller*, which is split by suppletion. Some of its forms are based on the stem *all-* (as in *allons*), some on *v-* (as in *vont*) and some on *ir-* (as in *irons*). These splits demonstrate that a lexeme's forms do not need to have any phonology in common. In this respect, the split is as radical as it could be; in certain other respects, as we shall see, there are more remarkable examples. I therefore set out a typology of possible splits, along four dimensions: form vs specification, motivated vs. morphomic, regular vs irregular and externally relevant vs. irrelevant. Of these, the most interesting concerns the 'relevance' of the split. We might expect these splits to be internal to the lexeme (as with *aller*). But there are examples where the split in a lexeme is externally relevant; as in the alignment found with some periphrastic forms in Archi (Daghestanian). Our typology sets out these oppositions individually. However, the unexpected patterns of behaviour may coincide in particular lexemes, giving rise to some remarkable examples, which show that the notion 'possible word' is more challenging than many linguists realize.

• La Journée scientifique de janvier 2011 aura lieu le 22 janvier 2011 : L'architecture des théories linguistiques, les modules et leurs interfaces (Ecole Normale Supérieure)