

Morphosyntactic Interleaving in Vietnamese and Pacoh

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In this paper, we investigate the phenomenon of *interleaving* in Vietnamese and a related language, Pacoh (Katuic, Mon-Khmer), and argue that it is a morphosyntactic operation and not a phonological one.

Vietnamese has a phenomenon in which two words may be interleaved with each other. In certain grammatical constructions, a single-syllable word may be copied and interleaved with the syllables of a two-syllable word. A pair of two-syllable words may also undergo this interleaving, resulting in the splitting of both words. Examples of this interleaving pattern are shown in (1):

- (1) Examples of Interleaving Construction (Thompson 1965; Nhàn 1984)
- | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------|---|----------------------|---|--|
| a. | <u>làm</u> | + | <u>giàu-có</u> | → | <u>làm</u> <u>giàu</u> <u>làm</u> <u>có</u> |
| | "do, make" | | "be wealthy" | | "make wealthy" |
| b. | <u>buôn-bán</u> | + | <u>đâu</u> | → | <u>buôn</u> <u>đâu</u> <u>bán</u> <u>đâu</u> |
| | "do business" | | "anywhere, wherever" | | "wherever (one) does business" |
| c. | <u>bàn-tìm</u> | + | <u>mưu-kế</u> | → | <u>bàn</u> <u>mưu</u> <u>tìm</u> <u>kế</u> |
| | "discuss in quest of" | | "schemes and ruses" | | "discuss strategy" |

The surface result of interleaving seems to violate wordhood in that it breaks the criteria of cohesiveness, that the elements of a grammatical words “always occur together, rather than scattered through the clause” (Dixon and Aikhenvald 2002, p. 19). Because of this, it has been argued that Vietnamese does not have phonological words (but moves directly from syllables to phonological phrases) and that interleaving is a phonological manipulation of the syllable structure (Emeneau 1951; Schiering et al. 2010).

However, we present three pieces of evidence that interleaving is not the manipulation of phonological syllables but is a morphosyntactic operations which deals with morphosyntactic objects. First, the interleaving operation respects morphosyntactic units (and not primarily syllables). This is evidenced by the fact that only some polysyllabic words can be interleaved (those that are *dvandva* compounds). Words that are monomorphemic but polysyllabic cannot be interleaved (2a) and even some compound words cannot be divided (2b). However, interleaving can be applied to multiply reduplicated polysyllabic units, as shown in (3):

- (2) Indivisible polysyllabic words (Noyer 1998)
- | | | | |
|----|--|----|---------------------------------|
| a. | xà-phòng “soap” (< French <i>savon</i>) | b. | ngã-lòng “despair” (fall+heart) |
| | *Tôi uống xà uống phòng. | | Tôi đã ngã (*đã) lòng |
| | I drink sa- drink -von | | I PAST fall (*PAST) heart |
| | Intended: “I drink soap” | | “I despaired” |
- (3) Interleaving with polysyllabic reduplicated forms (Thompson 1965)
- a. khóc-lóc “weep, cry” → khóc-lóc khóc-liếc “be a cry-baby”
Em đó hay khóc-lóc hay khóc-liếc “That child cries continuously”

Taken together, this evidence indicates that interleaving is the manipulation of morphosyntactic structure and not phonological structure.

Second, the interleaved order is not default order but is the result of some extra semantic or pragmatic force (often emphatic or extreme). This indicates the addition of some syntactico-semantic head which triggers the change. While this does not *a priori* rule out a phonological

operation, it points to a difference in the semantic and morphosyntactic structure between interleaved and non-interleaved outputs.

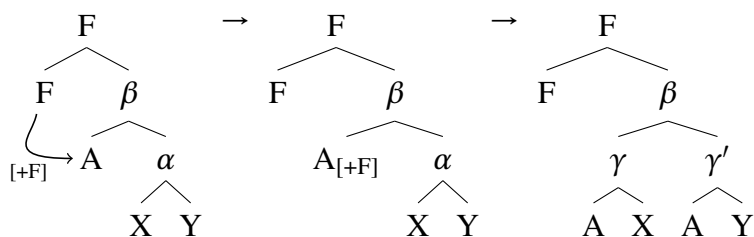
- (4) Extra semantic/pragmatic force in interleaved order (Nhàn 1984)
 đập bàn-ghế ‘beat the furniture’ ~ đập bàn đập ghế ‘bang all over the furniture’

Finally, we present additional evidence from a related language, Pacoh, which has the same interleaving process. Unlike Vietnamese, however, Pacoh regularly has polysyllabic words which undergo interleaving without breaking up into syllables (5). Additionally, Pacoh has three-member compounds which show a three-way interleaving (5b), showing again that this process is sensitive to morphological structure and not phonological structure.

- (5) Interleaving in Pacoh (Alves 2006)
 a. ?a.kəp "don't" + rew-ʔi.ri: "sad" → ?a.kəp rew ?a.kəp ʔi.ri: "don't be sad"
 b. jo:l "still have" + praʔ-ti.riəʔ-ʔa.kaj "wealth" → jo:l praʔ jo:l ti.riəʔ jo:l ʔa.kaj "still have wealth"

In our proposed analysis, interleaving is triggered by the addition of a particular syntacticosemantic head which assigns the feature [+F] to the node below it. This [+F] feature triggers a morphosyntactic operation which rewrites the assigned node and its sister, as schematized in (6):

- (6) Morphosyntactic Operation for Interleaving (cf. Nhàn 1984; Noyer 1998)



Because this is a morphosyntactic operation, the phonological shape of the nodes involved does not matter (thus, polysyllabic nodes may be interleaved). However, the operation manipulates only the assigned node, its sister, and their immediate daughter nodes. Assuming that *dvandva* compounds have a flat morphosyntactic structure (in contrast to other compound types), this restriction explains why this is the only type of compound that is able to be split by the interleaving operation.

In conclusion, the phonological, morphosyntactic, and semantic evidence indicates that interleaving in Vietnamese and Pacoh is a morphosyntactic operation and not a phonological manipulation.

References:

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