

THE RELEVANCE OF ZABROCKI'S THEORY OF DIACRISIS

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1. Introduction

In this paper it will be shown how Zabrocki's theory of diacrisis can be used to explain some morphological phenomena and changes, which so far have not been described satisfactory. These morphological changes or processes are: suffix-reinterpretation, clipping and the subsequent development of a new suffix and blending.

The three processes will not be discussed exhaustively. Here it will only be shown how Zabrocki's notion *confusivum*, which is the central notion of his theory of diacrisis, also called distinctive morphology, can be used to explain other phenomena.

2. Distinctive morphology

'The starting point for Zabrocki's theory was a critical review of the "Prague School" concept of the phoneme, where it was mainly defined in terms of distinctive function. According to Zabrocki 'this distinctive function is performed in language by segments not necessarily corresponding to a single segment but to units which are sequences of such segments' (Awedyk & Hamans 1992: 217-8).

For Zabrocki it is not the distinctive function of phonemes in minimal pairs such as (1) and (1a), that is essential, but the opposition between members of what may be called a 'diacritic paradigm', as presented in (2) and (2a). Comparison of the members of the lists in (2) and (2a) respectively show identical and different parts. Diacrisis is the process of finding the distinctions between the different members of the series. That is why the word lists in (2) and (2a) are called diacritic paradigms.

(1)

Polish	Gloss
dom	Home
tom	volume
łom	crowbar

(1a)

Dutch	Gloss
dom	stupid
som	sum
kom	bowl

(2)

Polish	Gloss
dom	house
grom	thunder
prom	ferry
złom	scrap
atom	atom

(2a)

Dutch	Gloss
dom	stupid
stom	stupid, dumb
brom	hum
blom	flower
krom	curved

According to Zabrocki, the oppositions in (2) and (2a) may be used to identify the 'identical' and the different parts of the forms in (2) and (2a), similarly to the way the oppositions in (1) and (1a) are used to define phonemes.

The identical forms, the so-called confusive elements or 'confusiva', have a certain reality for 'naïve' speakers, and since these naïve speakers recognize 'identical' parts, even where there is no formal or historical relationship, they may reanalyse new forms on the basis of such a recognised confusive element.

By distinguishing 'recognised' elements in partially opaque forms the 'naïve' language user tries to impose a structure on these opaque forms. So, for instance the words *dom*, *stom*, *brom*, *blom* and *krom* of (2a) share an identical part, the so called 'confusivum', -*om*, which is the rhyming part here and which is an element in the intuitive segmentation of the forms of this paradigm. However, a 'confusivum' is not necessarily the same as the rhyming part, as the examples in (3) show. The confusive elements are put in italics here.

(3) Confusive pairs

English	English
<i>home</i>	<i>broom</i>

<i>dwarf</i>	<i>dwell</i>
<i>heaven</i>	<i>maiden</i>
<i>slacker</i>	<i>snapper</i>

Confusive, and also diffusive, elements may be word initial, word final or may appear in intermediate positions. They also may be discontinuous, as in *slacker* – *snapper*. These last properties are not of great importance here; what counts in this context is that ‘naïve’ speakers may recognise a certain part of an output form as containing an element which is ‘identical’ to an element in another output form, analyse these forms as being the same and give a certain linguistic status – that of a ‘confusivum’ – to this part. Subsequently this ‘identical’ part may be used as a new language element. This, of course, is a form of reinterpretation (Van Marle & Koefoed 1988:508). The process sketched here is how Zabrocki’s theory may be used to explain the development of allomorphs.

3. Development of an allomorph

Zabrocki used his theory of diacrisis not only to criticise the Prague School, but also for the derivation of new suffixes from existing ones: ‘The boundaries of the diffusive and confusive elements may accidentally coincide with the boundaries of semantic and grammatical morphemes, such as in *Vielheit: Krankheit* ‘multiplicity: disease’. But that is just a coincidence, not a principle! The boundaries between diffusive and confusive elements are completely independent from the morpheme boundaries of lexical and grammatical morphemes. The boundaries between diffusive and confusive elements may even prove to be stronger than morphemic boundaries. This is something one may see in the emergence of new suffixes. In this way for instance the German suffix *-ling* developed. Following the pattern of *edeling: wihseling* “filius suppositus”: *smerling* (‘nobleman’ – ‘changeling’ – ‘falcon’), where one may distinguish a confusive element *-ling*, which does not correspond to the morphemic suffix *-ing*, a new suffix emerged: *-ling*. In this way, the boundaries of the distinctive morphemes turned out to be stronger than the morphemic boundaries’ (Zabrocki 1980/107/8) [transl. CH].

(4)

edeling	wihseling	smerling
nobleman	changeling	falcon

The forms presented in (4) consist of a first constituent + suffix *-ing*. However, according to Zabrocki ‘naïve’ language users recognised an accidental identical part *-ling* in

these three forms, since the last element of the first constituent is each time the same phoneme [l]. Because of the phonological similarity, the forms were divided into a first constituent *ede*, *wihse* and *smer* and a second constituent *-ling*. Since this 'confusivum' *-ling* has a certain frequency, the speakers of German may have thought that *-ling* is a language unit as well and started to use it as a (new) suffix, next to *-ing*. That is how German acquired an allomorph *-ling* next to *-ing*.

This process of suffix reinterpretation does not restrict itself to *-ing*, *-ling*, *-eling*. It is a quite common process in language change. For instance, alongside the Dutch suffix *-ig* one finds the allomorphic suffix *-erig*. A possible sketch of this development may be as follows (Hamans 1988: 294-5)

(5)

Dutch	Gloss	originates from	Dutch	Gloss
<i>dorstig</i>	thirsty	from	<i>dorst</i>	thirst
<i>gelovig</i>	religious	from	<i>geloof</i>	religion
<i>toornig</i>	angry	from	<i>toorn</i>	anger

(6)

Dutch	Gloss	originates from	Dutch	Gloss
<i>hongerig</i>	hungry	from	<i>honger</i>	hunger
<i>waterig</i>	watery	from	<i>water</i>	water
<i>stumperig</i>	stunted	from	<i>stumper</i>	lack all

Since the forms in (6) share a confusivum *-erig* this segment intuitively received a certain formal status and was used in new formations such as

(7)

Dutch	Gloss	originates from	Dutch	Gloss
<i>hout-erig</i>	stiff	from	<i>hout</i>	wood
<i>groen-erig</i>	greenish	from	<i>green</i>	groen
<i>zand-erig</i>	sandy	from	<i>zand</i>	sand

4. New allomorphs

Zabrocki's explanation not only works with 'old' suffixes, as the following examples show.

(8) -theek

Dutch example	Gloss
apotheek	pharmacy
hypotheek	mortgage, loan against collateral
bibliotheek	library
fonotheek	music library and library of sound recordings

Educated speakers of Dutch may know that these words are borrowed from Greek or are newly coined on a Greek basis. That is why they realize that, on the one hand, the words should be segmented as:

(9)

'Learned segmentation'	
apo	+theek
hypo	+theek
biblio	+theek
fono	+theek

On the other hand, the forms share a confusive element *-otheek*

(10)

Diacrisis	Confusivum
ap	– otheek
hyp	– otheek
bibli	– otheek
fon	– otheek

This confusivum leads more or less automatically to an allomorph *-otheek* next to *-theek* in natural way and thus to new formations.

(11)

Dutch example	Gloss
filmotheek	collection of movies
sportotheek	shop or lending center for sports equipment
spelothek	lending center for toys

le(e)rotheek	center where pupils may do their homework
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The constituents in these words are:

(12)

Segmentation	
film	+otheek
speel	+otheek
sport	+otheek
leer	+otheek

5. Clipping

A similar development one comes across when studying clipping. See the following examples.

(13)

Dutch			
Pure clipping	from	Full form	Gloss
aso	from	asociaal	antisocial
impo	from	impotent	impotent person
pedo	from	pedofiel	pedophile

(14)

Dutch				
Clipping plus suffixation in - <i>o</i>	Gloss	from	Full form	Gloss
alto	alternative person	from	alternatief	alternative
depro	depressed person	from	depressief	depressed
saggo	cantankerous person	from	chagrijnig	cantankerous

(15)

Dutch				
Suffixation in - <i>o</i> only	Gloss	from	Original form	Gloss

lullo	dumb person	from	lul	prick
duffo	dull person	from	duf	dull
rufto	farto	from	ruft(en) V.	fart

The clipped forms in (13) share a confusivum *-o*, which originally belonged to the full word. Naive speakers of Dutch (and English and other languages noticed the similarity of the endings and the semantic similarity. All these words denote human beings and have a negative or even pejorative meaning. Formally the words share another feature: they are truncated. That is why in (14) the confusivum may be used as a new suffix. The words are truncated, denote human beings and have a pejorative meaning. The development even goes one step further: the new suffix may be added after non-truncated, but short, monosyllabic nouns (or verbal stems).

6. Blending

Traditionally blending is seen as irregular, just as clipping. Therefore, it is usually considered not to be part of standard morphology.

(16)

English 'classical' blends	From
brunch	breakfast + lunch
smog	smoke + fog
Chunnel	Channel + tunnel

In these forms the first segment or cluster of the first word is combined with the final part of the second word, although a form like *chunnel* can also be explained as a combination of the whole consonantal skeleton of the form *channel* plus the vowel of the word *tunnel*. However, most blends may be described as a process of concatenation of truncated forms, whereby the left part of the first word is combined with the right part of the second word. Unclear is how much material of each word may be truncated.

The examples under (16) are not the only ones that are considered to be blends. There is another subcategory too. In the words under (17) the source words seem to have been analysed as quasi-compounds, which are composed of possible words or morphemes that subsequently form the building blocks of new 'compounds':

(17)

English 'quasi-compound' blends	From
Oxbridge	Ox(ford) + (Cam)bridge
stagflation	stag(nation) + (in)flation
advertorial	advert(isement) + (edit)orial

Also in (17) truncation of both ‘source words’ must have taken place. Again, it is unpredictable how much of the original forms must remain for a successful blend.

It goes too far to sketch a full-fledged analysis of blending here. A few observations must do.

(18)

Blends copying sw2's prosodic structure	Sw1	+	Sw2		Blend
	advértisement	+	editórial	→	advertórial
	ranch	+	subúrbia	→	ranchúrbia
	mótor(ist)	+	hotél	→	motél

These examples show that blends copy the stress pattern and the segmental structure of the second source word (the head). The question how much of the first (left) source word can be included into the final blend depends on the head. In almost all cases the first source word only may insert a portion similar to what has been truncated from the second source word. How much can be truncated from the second source word is a matter of recoverability.

The confusivum of the second source word and the resulting blend must be big enough to be recognizable. For instance *-torial* appears to be long enough to be recognizable as coming from *editorial*. This part *-torial*, the semantic and formal head of the blend, is ‘missing’ two syllables. Therefore, *advertisement* may supply two syllables to the final blend. These two syllables, *adver(t)* are a fine and also recognizable confusivum with *advertisement*.

7. Conclusion

Zabrocki’s concept of diacrisis is much more than a relevant critique of the notion phoneme as defined by the Prague School. Since it describes what happens when naïve language users recognize similar elements in words, it is a very useful theoretical concept in the description of analogical language change and production.