

AG 5: (Morphological) Blocking and Linguistic Variation

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It is a long-standing idea in grammatical theory that the morphological component does not tolerate doublets for a given slot in a paradigm (cf. *worse* vs. **badder*, *thief* vs. **stealer*). Following insights of the Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini, this generalization is usually modeled in terms of blocking rules that ensure that the availability of a more specific/marked form blocks the use of a less specific/marked form (cf. e.g. Kiparsky 1973, Anderson 1992, Wunderlich 1996, Noyer 1997, Stump 2001). Contrary to expectations, however, languages do show doublets: competing forms of a certain word or formative are quite common, due either to grammar-external factors such as language contact or to grammar-internal processes such as analogical change. This usually gives rise to linguistic variation involving forms that compete for a certain meaning or slot in a paradigm, e.g., regular and irregular past tense forms in German such as *backte* (reg.) vs. *buk* (irreg.) 'I/he/she/it baked'. After some period of coexistence, the competition between forms whose meaning is compatible is usually resolved, either by the loss of one competing form or by a change in which one form adopts a different meaning. While the loss of doublets can again be attributed to the workings of blocking mechanisms (cf. Kroch 1994), the very possibility of this kind of variation raises a number of issues for any theory of blocking and for grammatical theory more generally:

- What should a formal account of this type of linguistic variation look like? (e.g. Grammar Competition, Kroch 1989; equally optimal candidates under an OT account of blocking, Blutner 2000, Kiparsky 2004).
- Which (grammar-internal/grammar-external) factors govern the distribution of competing forms?
- Which factors determine the winner of the competition (e.g. simplicity in the case of analogical change vs. expressiveness in the case of grammaticalization processes)?
- Are there similar phenomena in other domains of grammar such as syntax (e.g. competing structures/word orders) or semantics (cf. e.g. Blutner 2000, 2002)? Is there also competition not only within components of grammar but also between components (cf. Ackema & Neeleman 2001 who argue that morphological processes may bleed syntactic operations and vice versa)?

The workshop is of interest for researchers working in the domain of theoretical linguistics, focusing on syntax, morphology, and semantics. In particular, we are looking forward to applications dealing with formal approaches to language variation and change.