

Emergent generalisation in an analogy-based theory of word-formation: predictions, evidence, and challenges

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The status of analogy as a mechanism of linguistic generalisation constitutes a much-debated topic among synchronic morphological theories, which can be broadly classified into those which assume that analogy is active only as a complementary mechanism and those that assume that analogy is THE central mechanism of productive inflection and word-formation. At the same time, and in spite of all the debate, analogy has largely remained a vague and elusive notion that is used in different and often theory-dependent senses in the literature.

In this paper I will argue that traditional conceptions of analogy as an unpredictable mechanism that is fundamentally different from grammatical behaviour cannot be upheld. Instead, computational models provide a framework that allows us to see that constraints on analogy, which make the mechanism predictable, emerge from properties of the lexical distribution itself. The prerequisite is a formally rigid mechanism as is implemented, for example, in AM (*Analogical Model of Language*, Skousen 1989 et seq.). I will present case studies from English that demonstrate that analogy is predictable and testable, and, even more importantly, that the predictions that are made by the mechanism closely resemble the empirical facts. It is an important goal of this paper to make transparent where exactly the predictive power of the analogy-based approach comes from.

The paper will also discuss challenges for analogy-based approaches. One major challenge lies in the development of an adequate theory of lexical representations. Given that productive generalisation is assumed to emerge from properties of the lexical distribution, such a theory constitutes a vital desideratum. I will discuss pertinent implications that emerge from the analysis of the case studies presented in the paper.