

Towards a New Meta-Language for Athabaskan Linguistics: The Case of Morphological Phrasemes

Josh Holden

OLST – Université de Montréal
Département de linguistique et traduction
CP 6128, Succ. Centre-ville
Montréal, Québec, H2C 3J7, Canada
josh.holden@umontreal.ca

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the analysis and citation of morphological phrasemes in the Athabaskan language Dene Sųłı́né. The concepts of derivation, morphoids, submorphs and morphological phraseme are reviewed, and a few principles are suggested for distinguishing morphological phrasemes from transparent derivation, followed by corollaries of how these principles can be applied to the presentation of interlinearized examples. This approach is contrasted with the current practice in Athabaskan and Americanist linguistics of not distinguishing between derivation and morphological phrasemes in the morphemic glosses.

1 Introduction

As essential as the concepts of inflection, derivation and etymology are to the analysis of the world's languages, there is no consensus among linguists as to their definitions. While translation practices for wordforms with inflection and derivation markers is fairly straightforward, there is no standard way of interlinearizing those wordforms which, while more analyzable than fully opaque, monomorphemic stems, are too lexicalized to be described as transparent derived stems. The question of how to translate such “morphemes” is particularly relevant when citing interlinearized data from lesser-known languages such as Dene Sųłı́né, henceforth Dene, an Athabaskan language from northwestern Canada which is the focus of this paper. Examples (1)-(2), taken from a study of another Athabaskan language¹, are typical of current interlinearization practices in the Athabaskanist literature.

Koyukon (Axelrod 1993:75)

- (1) ye-le-ø-tlel
3OB-3.PFV-CL-chop (SEMELFACTIVE)
'he gave it a chop'
- (2) le-ø-tseh
3.PFV-CL-cry (SEMELFACTIVE)
'people really mourned his death'

¹ AR="areal" (agreement or argument referring to place or situation), CL=classifier prefix (part of stem), H=high tone, IPFV=imperfective, ITER=iterative, MOM=momentaneous "aspect", NCM=fossilized object noun class agreement, PFV= perfective, REFL=reflexive object agreement, SBEN=self benefactive, VCD=*de*- verb class marker

The semelfactive derivation of a verb indicates an isolated instance of an activity which is usually ongoing. Unlike with (1), however, the meaning of (2) cannot be predicted by combining the signifieds claimed for its component parts. Using the semelfactive form of the verb root meaning ‘to cry’ should mean ‘to cry (once) suddenly’, but we see that it has the idiomatic meaning ‘to mourn a death’. Although the entire complex is lexicalized, the morphs are still glossed as if they constituted an example of synchronic derivation. What is the best way to present complex wordforms such as (2) so that the difference between morphology and etymology is accessible to researchers not intimately familiar with these languages? Before approaching the presentation of interlinearized examples like (2) it is crucial to review the typology of lexicalized morphological material as understood in Meaning-Text Theory (MTT). If concepts related to inflection, derivation and etymology are vaguely or inconsistently defined, linguists risk speaking at cross purposes when discussing derivational rules or interlinearized data from unfamiliar languages, making them inaccessible to researchers from outside of the specialized field.

When presenting a descriptive analysis of a lesser-studied language, a linguist will divide the signifiers of wordforms into supposedly elementary signs whose signifiers and signifieds could be united according to a descriptive rule to produce the wordform. Elementary linguistic signs are “not representable as [a combination of] other signs united by a meta-operation of linguistic union” (Mel’čuk 1993:64). Elementary signs can typically be classified as affixes or as roots. Following (Mel’čuk 1997:72), affixes mark inflectional and derivational meanings and are distinguished from the root [*racine*], “a stem [which] is a morph or quasi-morph of the language, whose syntactics are similar to the syntactics of most of the morphs or quasi-morphs of L, in that it contains much information about interlexical combinatorics of the wordform it is part of”. A large set of unique roots can be combined with at most a few dozen affixes, while the repertoire of up to a few dozen affixes in a language is combined with a very large group of unique stems. The stem [*radical*], simple or derived, “is the part of the wordform *w* that does not include any inflectional affixes which are part of that wordform and which express the grammemes that characterize *w* as a whole” (Mel’čuk 1997:72). Inflectional and derivational affixes are elementary signs with transparent grammatical meanings. Following the criteria in Mel’čuk (1993:311), a derivateme is a standard grammatical meaning which can be productively added to members of a syntactic class, so that speakers can add the derivateme to existing words to coin new lexemes readily interpretable to other speakers. Derivations can be first degree (added to an unanalyzable base, as in *child+ish*, or second degree (*childish+ness*, *institution+al*), third degree (*institutional+ly*), etc. This definition of derivation presupposes that the base is an extant word in the language, so the derived stem must be complex, not elementary. While linguists have often defined derivation in order to distinguish it from inflection (for example, in Bybee 1985 or Anderson 1992), the equally critical distinction between derivation and lexicalized morphological material or visible etymologies has been comparatively neglected.

The above definitions would be sufficient to analyze wordforms if all complex signifiers were linearly divisible into roots, inflectional and derivational affixes, all of which were indisputably elementary signs whose signifieds and signifiers could be transparently combined according to productive morphological rules. Of course, reality is much less neat. For example, should an analyst depict a signifier with an unpredictable meaning such as (2) as complex or elementary? Following Mel’čuk (1993:64), quasi-elementary signs are those whose signifiers are linearly divisible from the rest of the wordform but whose signifieds cannot be isolated from the meaning of the whole word, or alternatively those grammatical signifieds (derivatemes, grammemes) which can be isolated from the meaning of the word although their markers cannot (i.e. a portmanteau in conventional linguistic terminology). This paper is concerned mostly with the first type of quasi-elementary signs, those which are quasi-representable in their signifiers but not in their signifieds. These wordforms are linearly divisible into quasi-elementary signs or quasi-morphs, traces of former morphs whose signifieds cannot be distinguished from the meaning of the whole complex. Following Mel’čuk (1997:246-9) I will use the term *morphoid* to describe quasi-morphs which still bear a plausible semantic link with the meaning of the whole word, and *submorph* to describe those which no longer have so clear a link. In English, the quasi-suffix *-er* in *scanner* and *shaker* is a morphoid because the instrumental signified is still a component of the meaning of the word, regardless of the word’s idiosyncratic meaning. A submorph might be the formerly diminutive *-ettes* in the French

lunettes ‘eye glasses’. In no way is *lunettes* related to *lune* ‘moon’ in the modern language. In Dene, many morphoids are visible traces of old derivation markers, old incorporated nouns, and traces of fossilized agreement markers. Complexes of quasi-morphs which are semantically different from the sum of their parts are referred to as morphological phrasemes (Mel’čuk 1997:246-9). One can distinguish inflectional morphological phrasemes, a sort of morphological idiom whereby the language recycles inflection markers to express grammemes other than those typically denoted by those markers, from derivational morphological phrasemes, which are complex signifiers analyzable as an (ex-)derivational morphoid with a supposed lexical base. Such derivational morphoids must have originated as productive derivation markers, but they are by no means chosen by the speaker in the synchronic language, and in some cases would not even be possible to add to their base according to synchronic morphological rules. There must be evidence, however, for the existence at some point of the base to which it was once added. The prefix *re-* in the English verb *rewrite* meaning ‘to change something written in order to improve it’ is such a derivational morphoid, while the same “affix” in *repeat* is not, since *peat* is not a speech verb in English. The visible etymologies of morphoid-base complexes form a continuum between the fully transparent and the opaque. The best analogy in English is the etymology of compounds, which range from the transparent *backstab* (*back*+*stab*) and *babysit* (*baby*+*sit*), to the opaque *husband* (Old English *hus* ‘house’ + *bonda* ‘master’) and *garlic* (*gar* ‘spear’ + *leac* ‘root’). The former words were probably coined more recently than the second set, but such distinctions can only be speculative when discussing diachronic derivations in languages without a long written record. When analyzing Dene verbs, one finds a similar range of etymological transparency among complexes of derivational morphoids and former bases for derivation.

Dene verbs are almost exclusively prefixing, so the final element, virtually always the final syllable, is the root. The root is combined with one of four lexicalized prefixes known as “classifiers” in Athabaskanist literature, probably historically valence-changing derivation markers, but which are synchronically part of the stem. The motivation for dividing the classifiers from the root is that the classifiers retain prefix-like phonology such as voicing assimilation of the root’s initial consonant. The root-classifier combination constitutes the simplest type of verb stem, to which an inflectional marker is prefixed (see table 1 below for an outline of the verb’s structure). In addition to these simple, monosyllabic stems, there are discontinuous stems, combining the final radical-classifier pair with one or more elements to the left of the aspect, mood and subject agreement inflectional region. In some cases the origin of these elements is unknown, while in other cases they resemble fossilized prefixes, incorporated adverbs or nouns, or derivational morphoids, giving rise to discontinuous stems. The discontinuous stems can therefore be elementary or quasi-elementary signs.

verb	stem elements	infl	cl	root	gloss
<i>theda</i>		the	Ø	da	‘s/he sits’
<i>hetxj</i>		he	ɬ	ghɬ	‘s/he melts (it)’
<i>k’atheda</i>	k’a	the	Ø	da	‘s/he waits in ambush’
<i>yaɬti</i>	ya	Ø	ɬ	tɪ	‘s/he speaks’

Table 1. Types of Verb Stems in Dene.

The stem elements to the left of the inflection are never chosen by the speaker to coin a new lexeme building on the meaning of the classifier-root pair. The signifier of the verb *k’atheda* ‘s/he waits in ambush’ is partially representable as the formal combination of *k’a* ‘arrowhead’ and *theda* ‘s/he sits’, but the meaning of the element *k’a-* is not analyzable separately from the meaning of the whole verb. It does not denote a way of sitting, since the verb can be used regardless of the physical posture of the subject. The same word is used if the subject is armed with a gun, so ‘arrowhead’ is no longer a semantic

component of the definition. Nor is an element *k'a-* used in any other verbs with an adverbial meaning like 'in ambush'. It is easy to speculate on its diachronic origin as an incorporated noun, but modern Dene no longer has productive noun incorporation. The element *ya-* in *yattu* is even harder to analyze diachronically. Interlaced with these left-side discontinuous stem elements are genuine transparent derivation markers, including aspect and Aktionsart markers such as the iterative.

Every living language is in a state of constant change, so genuine derivation markers tend to co-exist with formally similar derivational morphoids. So the French derived stems *maison+ette* 'little house' and *fille+ette* 'little girl' are bimorphemic while the morphological phrasemes *lunette* 'eyeglass lens' (**lune+ette* *'small moon') and *bicyclette* 'bicycle' are quasi-elementary signs. In Dene morphoids and submorphs are usually former derivational prefixes on a (now quasi-)elementary root.² For example, the iterative marker *na-* in Dene can be added to some verbs with the meaning '[V] again'. However a similar morphoid appears in many other verbs which can be considered morphological phrasemes. The meanings of these phrasemes involve repetition in some way, but with other highly specific, unpredictable semantic components. Table 2 provides some examples of both.

Derivation			
base	gloss	base + derivation	gloss
nasther	'I stay'	nanasther	'I stay again'
destth'agh	'I hear (it)'	narestth'a ³	'I hear (it) again'

Morphological Phraseme			
lexeme 1	gloss	lexeme 2	gloss
noresker	'I'm asking you'	nanoresker	'I'm begging you', *'I'm asking you again'
yareŋti	's/he speaks to self'	k'enayareŋti	's/he repeats self' *'s/he says it again'
yelna	's/he provides for him/her'	nayelna	's/he heals him/her' *'s/he provides for him/her again'

Table 2. Examples of *na-* the iterative marker and *na-* the morphoid.

The *na-* morphoid in the second set of words obviously resembles the iterative marker, but those lexemes can now be considered unrelated because their meanings are so unpredictable. For example, the verb *k'enáyareŋti* 's/he repeats' is used specifically when someone reiterates his or her idea in a long-winded, verbose way. To indicate saying an utterance twice, a speaker could instead place the adverb *ǵáŋi* (*ǵláh*) '(once) again' before another verb meaning 'say' or 'tell'.

2 Current Presentation of Derivation and Derivational Morphological Phrasemes

Following the tendency of morphologists in other fields, linguists focusing on Athabaskan and many other American languages have given more attention to the relationship between inflection and derivation in their languages of study than to the differences between derivation and derivational morphological

² A number of psycholinguistic studies focus on the psychological reality of prefix and quasi-prefix elements. Note that the MTT framework presents principles for building an analytical lexicon that distinguishes between fixed, learned forms and derived words that could potentially be created spontaneously by a speaker who had never heard the word before, and it does not make claims about the psychological reality or processing of these units.

³ Verb roots are often slightly suppletive (i.e. *-tth'agh/tth'a*) according to the grammemes and derivatememes added.

phrasemes. Athabaskanists tend to use similar terminology for describe complex words like (1) and (2), and tend to present similar morphemic translations for both types. The verbs in (3) and (4) are two more typical examples of the tendency to interlinearize morphological phrasemes as if they were examples of transparent derivation (glosses by the authors)

- Slavey (Rice 1989, cited in Rice 2000:144)
- (3) *dáh-’ede-d-í-d-lu*
 up-REFL-NCM-ASPECT-CL-handle.rope
 ‘she hanged herself’
- Mohawk (Mithun 1984)
- (4) *t-a-yoti-’nikù:r-v’ne*
 change-PAST-IT/THEM-mind-fall
 ‘it shocked them’

Example (3) uses a handling verb with a directional prefix *dáh-* ‘up’ and the reflexive direct object pronominal agreement marker. The noun class marker prefix is a fossilized agreement marker used because the root refers to an object of a particular shape; it is not freely chosen by the speaker. Literally (3) means something like ‘she put a rope up for herself’ or perhaps ‘she tied herself up high’, but the actual meaning is ‘she killed herself by hanging’. Presumably one could not follow (3) with a second clause like ‘but she didn’t die’. Example (4) is even more figurative, although the semantic link between the meaning of the word and the morphoids etymologically related to ‘mind’ and ‘fall’ is clear. Still, the verb stems in (3) and (4) must mean ‘to kill by hanging’ and ‘to shock emotionally’ respectively, with inflectional markers (person agreement and perfective aspect) added.

All of these examples were chosen quite randomly, to illustrate how pervasive a lack of overt distinction between derivation and etymology is, not to single out any particular author or framework. Presenting the data this way does point out some interesting etymologies, and as experts on these languages the authors had no need to indicate what was lexicalized for their own benefit. However, not specifying this knowledge explicitly, and glossing phrasemes as if they were derived stems, risks overgeneralizing the productivity of certain derivational rules, or in the worst cases suggests the existence of derivational rules which are not part of the synchronic grammar. This tendency risks obscuring the morphology to outsiders and ultimately reducing the impact of our studies in the wider linguistics community. The distinction between extant derivation markers and derivational morphoids should therefore be made explicit in the interlinear translation.

Another tendency in Athabaskan and Americanist linguistics is towards breaking polysynthetic wordforms into the smallest identifiable bits, to the point of finding quasi-morphs even where they have apparently not undergone an operation of linguistic union for a very long time. So a noun like *tthot’jné* meaning ‘English’ or ‘anglophone’ might be interlinearized as *tthe-yeh-hot’jné* meaning *stone-house-people:PO*. This is akin to dividing *husband* and *garlic* into *house+bound* and *gar+leek*, compounds recognizable only to students of Old English. It is not enough to discuss such elements as compounds and then note that they are “lexicalized”, with no further detail. Presenting synchronic and historical compounds identically risks overstating the productivity or flexibility of compounding in these languages.

A third tendency in Athabaskan and Americanist morphology is to posit “morphemes” based on formal similarities between lexemes. Example (5) from Cook (2004:234) is an example of this.

- (5) *nádhher* ‘s/he stays’
 ts’énidher ‘I woke up’
 núnı́dher ‘it (time) has come’
 núnı́łther ‘I have grown old’

These verbs share formally similar roots. The author discusses these verbs as “lexically derived” from a common abstract root, whose “literal meaning”, it is claimed, “refers to passing time”. While at one point the author mentions that words are related “at least etymologically”, they are nonetheless discussed as an example of synchronic derivation. While it is fascinating to speculate about such etymological relationships, defining “morphemes” on the basis of formal similarity can lead to odd and unprincipled divisions. For example, Singh and Neuvel (2003) cite need to avoid giving morphemic status to elements such as an *eau* ‘water’ “morpheme” common to *bateau* ‘boat’ and *radeau* ‘raft’, despite their semantic commonality. Similarly situated are the famous phonosthemes of Firth (1930), such as the *gl-* sequence common to *glitter*, *gleam*, *glisten*, etc. Unfortunately when lesser-known languages are being analyzed by speakers of European languages, this trap may be easier to fall into. This has the additional disadvantage of leading the analyst to posit unusual grammatical rules in these languages that allow for the derivation of a small set of such forms. In Dene, the existence of perhaps a few dozen words similar to *k’atheda* ‘s/he waits in ambush’ has resulted in Athabaskan grammars presenting this language as having noun incorporation of instrumentals and direct object arguments, albeit admittedly different from classic incorporation in languages such as Inuktitut and Chukchi. While noun incorporation need hardly be completely productive to be considered part of the synchronic grammar, even the most “lexical” sorts of incorporation (Mithun’s Type I incorporates) involve the coining of new verb-incorporate combinations as an available synchronic process, at least until the languages are critically endangered (Mithun 1984). In Dene, on the other hand, verbs with incorporated nouns form a small repertoire of learned forms. So in Athabaskan studies conflating derivation with derivational morphological phrasemes has resulted in Dene grammar as being characterized as having incorporation, while the existence in French of similar words like *maintenir* ‘maintain, support’ (from *main* ‘hand’+ *tenir* ‘hold’) and *colporter* ‘carry on neck’ (*col* ‘neck’ + *porter* ‘carry’) has not led linguists to posit noun incorporation as part of French grammar, because the distinction between studying derivation and studying etymology in European languages has remained relatively stark.

3 Improving Consistency Between Interlinearization and the Grammar

It is particularly vital to distinguish synchronic derivations from morphological phrasemes in the presentation of interlinearized wordforms and texts. Current interlinearization practices in Americanist and Athabaskan studies reflect the aforementioned tendency to analyze and gloss any sequence that could possibly be considered linearly divisible as a sequence of morphs. The analyst decides how small the divisions should be based on his or her knowledge of the lexicon and etymology or for the convenience of the unrelated purpose at hand. Below are three examples of how the morphemic glosses of two Dene phrasemes might be presented if they appeared in various major grammars or dictionaries.

	<i>nayełna</i> ‘s/he heals him/her’	<i>nanoresker</i> ‘I beg you’
	na-ye-ghe-ł-na	na-ne-ho-de-s-ł-ker
(6)	ITER-3SG.OB-3SG.SUBJ-CL-live	ITER-2SG.OB-AR-VCD-1SG.SUBJ.IPFV-CL-root
(7)	heal-3SG.OB-3SG.SUBJ-CL-heal	ITER-2SG.OB-ask-1SG.SUBJ.IPFV-CL-ask
(8)	3SG.OB/3SG.SUBJ.IPFV:heal	2SG.OB/1SG.SUBJ.IPFV:beg

The differences are not due to conflicting morphological analyses so much as to vague definitions. No difference is made between learned forms with origins as derived stems and derivatememes chosen by the speaker. While certainly the clearest way to present examples of transparent synchronic derivation and inflection, this approach crashes hard when applied to morphological phrasemes. Within a grammar or dictionary, various discontinuous stems might not be broken down and glossed to a similar degree, depending on the analyst’s knowledge of and interest in etymologies. This is confusing for students of morphology and etymology as well as for linguists not intimately familiar with Athabaskan morphology.

To ensure a more transparent presentation of interlinearized examples, it would be helpful to consistently apply the following principles whatever the specific decisions of the analyst may be.

A. Derivations must be distinguished from morphological phrasemes.

B. Morphoids, submorphs and elementary signs should all be distinguished from each other.

The first principle is more important than the second, because treating elementary and quasi-elementary signs identically mischaracterizes the grammatical system of the modern language. The second principle is highly valuable, because in erring on the opposite side and presenting long verb stems with an array of morphoids as unanalyzable elementary signs we risk losing valuable information about diachronic change and lexicalization. Below are three corollaries of the above principles, showing how they could be applied to real interlinear translations.

1. In an interlinearization of a morphological phraseme, morphoids and their (former) morphemic glosses are italicized, while derivation markers and their glosses are not. The root or base is also italicized, so everything italicized is synchronically lexical rather than grammatical. All elements not italicized are part of the synchronic grammar. Compare (9a) with (9b).

- | | |
|--|---|
| (9) a. <i>narestth'a</i>
<i>na-de-s-ø-tth'a</i>
ITER-hear-1.IPFV-CL-hear
'I hear again' | b. <i>nanoresker</i>
<i>na-ne-hode-s-t-ker</i>
ITER-2SG.OB-ask-1.IPFV-CL-ask
'I beg you' |
|--|---|

Derivational morphoids are part of the stem, and are only glossed as former grammatical morphemes if the analyst can posit a diachronic evolution of that derived stem into a morphological phraseme. This restriction also helps distinguish derivational processes that exist in modern Dene, such as Aktionsart derivation, from processes that are theorized to have existed in the past but are longer active.

2. While all noninflectional and nonderivational material is italicized in the second line, only morphoids are glossed. Submorphs are not glossed at all (comparing *na-* in 10a and 10b).

- | | |
|---|--|
| (10) a. <i>nayełna</i>
<i>na-ye-ghe-t-na</i>
ITER-3OB-3SUBJ.IPFV-CL-live
'he is healing him' | b. <i>nabadhi</i>
<i>naba-ø-ø-dhi</i>
nosy-3.IPFV-CL-nosy
'she is nosy' |
|---|--|

Naturally it is up to the linguist to decide which elements are morphoids and which are submorphs, i.e. what constitutes a plausible semantic link. Even *nabadhi* 's/he is nosy' in (10b) and the verb *badhi* 's/he wants to ingest (it)' share the semantic component of desire, so one could argue that *na-* is a morphoid rather than a submorph. An analyst could go further and speculate that *badhi* originated as *ba* 'for' + *dhi* 'think', although *-dhi* alone is not a stem denoting 'think' in modern Dene. Assuming that all these elements are considered submorphs rather than morphoids, they should be mentioned outside of the four-line interlinearization format, for example in a footnote. A verb stem with an "incorporated" noun like *k'atheda* in Table 1 would be glossed as quasi-elementary (with the etymology in a footnote), as in (11).

- (11) *k'atheda*
k'a-the-ø-da
wait.ambush-3.IPFV-CL-wait.ambush (SG)
's/he waits in ambush'

3. Morphoids can be divided off until the analyst reaches an indivisible base. Any linear division of a morphological phraseme implies a diachronic meta-operation of linguistic union.

To treat elements as derivational morphoids, there must be an extant (ex-)base in the language to which the derivation marker could have been affixed. This prevents a wordform like (12a) from being entirely divided into morphoids (apart from its inflection markers), none of which could have been a base for derivation, as in the alternative gloss in (12b).

- | | |
|---|--|
| (12) a. <i>nanoresker</i>
<i>na-ne-hode-s-t-ker</i>
<i>ITER-2SG.OB-ask-1SG.IPFV-CL-ask</i>
‘I beg you’ | b. <i>nanoresker</i>
<i>na-ne-ho-de-s-t-ker</i>
<i>ITER-2SG.OB-AR-VCD-CL-stem</i>
‘I beg you’ |
|---|--|

The portion *-hode-* in (12a) could in principle be further divided as in (12b), but the remainder *relker/ker* is not a meaningful sign, so no meta-operation of linguistic union could apply. In English, this corollary allows for a division like *betray+al* but not *be+tray+al*. At least a plausible story of diachronic linguistic union must be possible. This keeps the practice of glossing morphoids consistent with the MTT definition of derivation in Section 1. Moreover, glossing the portion *hode..t-ker* as a stem meaning ‘ask’ in (12a) constitutes a claim that this sequence is fact an existing Dene verb stem (true).

Applying this principle consistently to Dene verbs produces some rather unconventional interlinearizations, given the unusual interlaced ordering of discontinuous stem elements, inflectional and derivational prefixes in Athabaskan verb morphology. Whatever is glossed as the stem must be constant across the inflectional paradigm. The lexical meaning of the verb is associated with the whole stem including the morphoids.

- (13) *natthirest’a*
natthire-s-Ø-t’a
get.up-1.IPFV-CL-get.up (IPFV)
 ‘I get up (in the morning)’
- (14) *tunéhdq*
tune-H-Ø-dq
drown-3.PFV-CL-drown
 ‘he drowned’
- (15) *hasonéltq*
há-se-hone-H-t-tq
teach-1OB-teach-3.PFV-CL-teach (PFV)
 ‘they taught me’

The stem of (13), could in principle be given the etymology *na-tthi-de...Ø-t’a* or *ITER-head-NCM...CL-move.round*, literally something like ‘to move (as a round object) one’s head again’, just as etymology of the stem meaning ‘to drown’ in (14) could be *tu-ne...Ø-dq* or *water-MOM...CL-drink*, literally ‘to drink water to an endpoint’. It is harder to posit an etymology for (15), but one could speculate about the origin of several of the submorphs. According to the conventions proposed in this paper, all of these speculative etymologies should be relegated to footnotes or somewhere outside of the interlinear gloss, so as to clearly differentiate them from the morphology. The present author has already been applied to this style of interlinear translation to long Dene texts, making the morphology easily accessible to non-Athabaskanists and even without overburdening the text with footnotes.

Conclusion

Interlinear translation forces the analyst and the reader to confront the interaction between the language's morphology and its lexicon. Linguists working outside of MTT may disagree on the precise definitions of concepts such as the morpheme, derivation, phraseology, etc., and their relationship with the lexicon, and each framework has its own traditional terminology. However, all linguists should agree that a specific analysis is better than avoidance of such thorny questions. The MTT concepts of morphological phraseme, quasi-elementary and elementary signs, morphoids and submorphs provide an extremely valuable framework for presenting interlinearized translations of lexicalized wordforms with visible etymologies without undermining the grammatical description. The translation practices suggested above could be extremely helpful in explaining the extremely numerous morphological phrasemes in understudied languages of theoretical interest such as Dene to the larger linguistics community. The MTT framework therefore has the potential to enhance the contribution of Athabaskan linguistics to the broader fields of American linguistics and to general morphology and lexicography.

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