

ON THE NOTION OF SUBMORPH AND ITS APPLICABILITY  
TO THE LANGUAGES OF EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

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It is well known that syllables coincide with morphemes in Chinese, Vietnamese and many other languages of East and South-East Asia; the term "morphosyllable" reflects this property. The particular importance of singling out this unit is connected with its correspondence to the primary phonetical and lexical unit of the Chinese linguistic tradition (ji).

However it is known that this unit does not always correspond to the usual conception of morpheme (Kasevich 1990: 67-69). We can not describe all the definitions of morpheme and their differences but it is necessary for us to note that the majority of them is connected with the conception of morpheme as a meaningful unit. This conception is productive for morphology and derivation. If some asemantic morphemes are recognized they are residual segments which are hardly included into meaningful segments, for instance the thematic vowels in composita in many Indo-European languages.

Many Chinese or Vietnamese "morphosyllables" have no meaning but they are not residual either: Chinese zhi and zhu in zhizhu 'spider', pi and li in pili 'thunder', yao and tiao in yaotiao 'solitary', pu and tao in putao 'vine'; also in loan-words: mo and cang in modang 'modern', qiao, ke and li in qiaokeli 'chocolate'; the list of such examples is in (Semenas 1992: 27). The contrary case, the amalgamation of two morphemes in one syllable is more rare: Chinese wa-r 'play' (the so-called erization). "Morphosyllables" do

not coincide with morphemes is about 7% of words included in the Chinese dictionaries (Semenas 1992: 27). The number of such cases is rising now since

they are especially frequent in the loan-words and the number of which becomes significant in view of the process of internationalization.

We can not think that all the meaning of such words is concentrated in one "morphosyllable" while the other "morphosyllables" are asemanitic, for instance in putao pu means 'vine' and tao means nothing. Only putao, modang and so on as a whole correspond to the definitions of morpheme; from the point of view of grammar we have all the reasons to consider putao, modang as the usual meaningful "morphosyllables" such as ren 'man'.

However there is also possible another approach to morphemes except the grammatical one. It is the investigation of the own morpheme structure. This investigation is the subject of a special branch of linguistics - morphophonology established by N.S.Trubetskoy (Trubetskoy 1929; Trubetskoy 1934).

Although morphophonology is connected with the investigation of the structure of morphemes consisting of phonemes, moras and syllables, the majority of linguists does not consider morphemes as meaningful units at the time of the morphophonological description of a language. For instance S.E.Martin defines morpheme as a meaningful unit but does not follow this description when compiling the list of Sino-Japanese morphemes (without distinguishing of homonyms) (Martin 1952: 24-26). We see the Japanese "morpheme" buku which is used only in bukuryoo 'Pachyma hoelen' (plant) from Chinese fuling although only bukuryoo as a whole has a meaning. S.E.Martin does not include in his list

bukuryoo or budoo 'vine' from above-mentioned putao and it is right from the morphophonological point of view. However the contradiction arises between the grammatical and morphophonological approaches. One term "morpheme" applies to different units.

We think that it is possible to overcome this contradiction by the use of the term submorph. This notion is introduced in the book (Churganova 1973) which deals with the morphophonology of Russian; see also (Kasevich 1986). In Russian "the number of the types of the distribution of morphological units is built not on meaningful categorical foundation but on pure morphophonological ones irrespective of the presence or absence of meaning of these elements" (Churganova 1973: 11). One of examples in (Churganova 1973) is the derivation of diminutives. For instance if nouns end to =ets they form diminutives by the change of =ets to =chik although =ets can be a morpheme or only a part of a morpheme: kup=it' 'buy', kup=ets 'merchant', kup=chik 'little merchant' and konets 'end', konchik 'little end' although konets is not divided to morphemes. The author of the book proposes to consider the maximal morphophonological unit to be not a morpheme but a submorph; submorph can be meaningful or meaningless (Churganova 1973: 13). V.G. Churganova distinguishes submorphs (=ets in konets) and "morphophonological nuclei" (kon=) but we define submorphs wide than V.G.Churganova and V.B.Kasevich: kon=, =ets, kup=, =ets are submorphs; there are two submorphs and two morphemes in kupets but two submorphs and one morpheme in konets.

The "morphosyllables" of Chinese and the other languages of East and South-East Asia are submorphs. They can be meaningful or meaningless but they have the rigid structure: they are equal to syllables and

the phoneme structure of every syllable is rigid too. The erization complicates slightly the situation but such cases are not numerous and we can enumerate them. However the presence or absence of meaning is not predictable and it is not connected with the structure of submorphs.

We can compare submorphs in Chinese with submorphs in Chinese loan-words in Japanese. Such submorphs in Japanese can be unequal to one syllable and can consist of two syllables: koku 'state' from go or above-mentioned buku from fu. However this transformation is regular and the rigid structure of submorphs is preserved. The separation of such submorphs in Japanese is supported by the script: every submorph is written by one character. The separation is additionally confirmed by the abbreviations: every abbreviation is formed from submorphs but not from morphemes: keidaisotsu 'graduation of the Keio university' from keioo=daigaku=sotsugyoo although the proper name Keio is not divided into meaningful components.

The so-called syllable languages of East and South-East Asia and the languages with the considerable influence of the syllable languages (Japanese, Korean) demonstrate the necessity of the notion of submorph as the maximal unit of morphophonology. Such necessity is more significant for these languages than for the inflected languages of Europe. It is difficult and maybe impossible to single out submorphs of the latter languages irrespective of singling out morphemes but we can single out Chinese or Vietnamese submorphs only by morphophonological criteria. The arrangement of phonological units of the syllable languages is very rigid; it leads to the rigid structure of submorphs and to lack of their coincidence with morphemes since the degree of the idiomatization of

morpheme combinations is not connected with the formal structures of morphemes.

The syllable languages is one pole of a typological scale. The contrary pole is the set of the inflected languages with rich morphology (Russian, Latin etc.). The distinguishing of morphemes and submorphs is actual for these languages too but for the different reason: there are many former morphemes which lost their meaning but preserved their formal features; the term "submorph" is proposed in (Churganova 1973) for such former morphemes first of all. The importance of the notion of submorph is the least for the agglutinative languages which are in the middle on the typological scale. For instance lack of coincidence of submorphs and morphemes in Japanese is evident in the loan-words from Chinese and in the onomatopoeic words but it is not very clear in the central part of the purely Japanese vocabulary.

There is one more difference between Chinese and Russian submorphs. Chinese submorphs (and the submorphs of the other syllable languages) are the most important psycholinguistic units kept to the memory of native speakers. This hypothesis is confirmed by the analysis of the Chinese linguistic tradition and by psycholinguistic experiments (Karapetyants 1982). In this respect they can be compared with the words of the European languages. The submorphs of Russian and the other inflected languages do not possess this characteristics.

The meaningless submorphs of the syllable languages are similar not only to the submorphs of the languages of different structures but to the meaningless words in idioms as *betwixt in betwixt and between*. The submorphs are similar to idioms in one more respect: an asymmetrical relation between meaning and

expression is manifested in both cases. The formal structure of idioms is usually the same as the structure of usual word-combinations but the semantic structure of the full idioms is the same as the structure of words. Idioms are not specific both in form and in meaning although their investigation (phraseology) is the particular branch of linguistics because of this lack of coincidence. The case of Chinese putao or Russian konets is the similar: the form of these units is the same as the form of composita or derivatives but their meaning is the same as the meaning of morphemes.

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