

## Beyond morpho-phonology: Phonetic detail and morphological structure

Ingo Plag

Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf

Plenary talk Old World Conference on Phonology 2017, February

Traditional approaches to the role of sound structure in the description of complex words have usually focused on phonologically conditioned allomorphy or morphologically conditioned segmental or prosodic alternations (such as stress shift, stress preservation, truncation, degemination, or syllabification in English). Such studies have detected interesting generalizations across sets of words but recent empirical studies have found a lot of variation, which calls into question long-cherished ideas about the organization of morpho-phonology.

Similarly, the amount of variation observable at the phonetic level has not been looked at systematically, although it has been frequently noted that phonetic reduction may have some relation to morphological complexity. Consider, for example, the word *government*. It is mostly pronounced [gʌvmənt] or [gʌvəmənt], and this phonological opacity goes together with semantic opacity: *government* does not primarily denote ‘action of VERBing’ (as is standardly the case with *-ment* derivatives), but rather denotes the people who govern, or, more generally, ‘political authorities’. It can thus be argued that *government* is morphologically less easily segmentable than, say, *discernment*, where there is no phonetic reduction and full semantic transparency. Empirical investigations in this domain are rare and somewhat inconclusive as to the question whether there are clear correlates of phonetic parameters and morphological structure.

This paper will present some recent morpho-phonetic studies from our lab that shed more light on this issue. Our empirical results challenge fundamental and widely-shared assumptions about morpho-phonology. In this paper we will look at some acoustic properties of allegedly homophonous suffixes and of some derivational affixes. It will be shown that the acoustic properties of complex words may systematically reflect morphological structure. These findings have serious implications for models of phonology-morphology interaction and speech production.