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A NOTE ON MORPHEMIC FUSION AND EMPTY MORPHS

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The variety of answers that has been suggested to describe the morphemic status of components of morphemic fusion indicates the complexity of the problem. Therefore, we are fully cognizant of the danger of declaring that there is a completely satisfactory path out of this labyrinth. Yet an examination of the available paths indicates that not all possibilities have been explored completely. It is to this investigation that we turn.

In the Fox material, Hockett\(^1\) pointed out that in terms of tactics it is of no great import whether one assigns the -\(i\)- of poonimeeswa 'he stops talking to him' to the morpheme poon- 'cease' or to the morpheme -\(m\)- 'act by speech on an animate object.' But to declare that the problem does not exist on the tactical level does not imply that the problem of morphemic evaluation has thereby vanished. Indeed, Hockett has suggested that problems of this nature could be handled in terms of the concept of 'empty morph'\(^2\) which assigns the phonemic material to no morpheme. Apparently this earlier suggestion of Hockett's was not entirely satisfactory, since later he rejected the concept of empty morph and indicated that it was preferable to 'classify the phonemic material as morphemically irrelevant'.\(^3\) The latter of these alternatives abandons the principle of total accountability.

Pike\(^4\) has suggested the term empty morpheme which has the advantage of of assigning definite morphemic status to what has been previously termed empty morph. But in terms of Pike's suggestion, the gain in morphemic status is lost by the implication of arbitrary segmentation that is required to assign the phonemic material to one of two possible morphemes.\(^5\)

An alternate analysis is possible, based on an analogy and suggestions made by Fries, Hockett, and Pike. Both Hockett\(^6\) and Pike\(^7\) have pointed out that in a rapid utterance of a word like biting it is indeterminate whether the /t/ should be assigned to the first syllable or to the second syllable. Therefore, they have assigned this phoneme structurally to both syllables as a phoneme in simultaneous double function. Similarly, Pike assigns a whole syllable to double function.\(^8\) Thus, a syllable may serve both as completing the first stress group and initiating the second stress group, e.g., in the phrase a book
of stories pronounced without dropping the intonation from mid-high on book until the word of. Hockett\(^9\) points out that in Potawatomi syntax a noun may serve in double function in two clauses; this function he has termed pivot. Fries\(^10\) considers the second have in the sentence they have to have the students pay in double function as both a verb and a function word. In handling problems of morphemic fusion, Pike\(^11\) has pointed out that in rapid pronunciation of as you (like), the as and you sometimes have a \(\tilde{z}\) sound between them which cannot be assigned as an allomorph of either the morpheme as or the morpheme you. Therefore, Pike considers that this \(\tilde{z}\) sound serves in double function as an integral part of both morphemes.

If this line of thought be pursued further, it is possible to assign what has been termed an 'empty morph' or 'empty morpheme' as a simultaneous structural part of two morphemes. In the Fox material the \(-i-\) would be considered to be in double function in that it occurs in both the morpheme poon\(-\)-poon-\(i\)- 'cease' and the morpheme \(-m-\)-im- 'act by speech on an animate object'.\(^12\) It is granted that in this alternate analysis there is a possible loss of economy of statement; nevertheless it should be pointed out that it is internally coherent within at least Pike's theoretical framework; it takes seriously the principle of total accountability; and it eliminates the concept of 'empty', whether it be what Pike has called 'empty morpheme' or what Hockett has called 'empty morph'.*

*[A point that seems to have been consistently overlooked in discussions of this kind is that the so-called 'empty morphs' may be what might be called 'transition markers' (or the like). If this is done, they are, of course, morphemes like any other. Until it is realized that morphs and morphemes are occurrences in a structure, and not 'meaningful units', such problems cannot be solved. —GLT.]

\(^1\)Charles F. Hockett, 'Problems of morphemic analysis', Lg23.333 (1947).
\(^2\)Loc. cit.
\(^3\)Charles F. Hockett, 'Peiping morphophonemics', Lg26.67, fn.8 (1950).
\(^5\)Implications that can be drawn from Richard S. Pittman's paper 'Class and construction markers' (read at the 1953 Pacific Science Congress in Manila and to be printed in the Proceedings of the Congress) indicate that within his
theoretical framework many empty morphs would be considered construction markers. This indeed may prove to be a fruitful way of handling this difficult problem in morphemic analysis; but Pittman's analysis can not be considered in detail, since it is not central to the point of view developed in this paper.

7 Pike, *ibid* §9.236.
9 Charles F. Hockett, 'Potawatomi syntax', *Lg*15.244 (1939).
10 Charles C. Fries, 'Have as a function word', *Language Learning* 1.7-8 (1948).
11 Pike, *ibid* §6.55. Note also that a similar type of analysis is suggested briefly in Eugene A. Nida, *Morphology: the descriptive analysis of words*, 77 (Ann Arbor, 1949).
12 The bold-face italic /i/ (1) in the allomorphs indicates the double function of that phonemic material.

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