

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Morphonological Variability in Word-Formation Relations

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Abstract

Morphonological variability represents one of the most significant phenomena in derivational linguistics, reflecting the interaction between phonological and morphological processes during word formation. In Russian, morphonological alternations play an essential role in establishing derivational relationships between motivating and derived words. These changes contribute not only to the formal organization of lexical units but also to the functioning and development of the language system as a whole. The present article examines the nature of morphonological variability in word-formation relations, identifies its principal types, and analyzes its linguistic functions. The study is based on a structural-semantic analysis of Russian derivational patterns. The findings demonstrate that morphonological processes facilitate lexical expansion, preserve phonetic harmony, and ensure the productivity of derivational models. The article highlights the importance of morphonological variability as a mechanism that contributes to the dynamic development of the Russian lexical system.

KEYWORDS

Morphonology, word formation, derivation, morphonological variability, Russian language, alternation, lexical development, derivational relations.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic and evolving system in which various linguistic levels interact continuously. One of the most complex areas of linguistic study concerns the relationship between phonological and morphological structures. This interaction becomes particularly evident in word-formation processes, where the creation of new lexical units often involves changes in the phonological shape of morphemes.

Morphonology occupies an intermediate position between phonology and morphology. It studies phonological alternations conditioned by morphological structures and examines how such changes function within the language system. In the Russian language, morphonological variability is especially productive due to the rich derivational potential of its morphological system.

Word formation frequently triggers modifications in root morphemes, affixes, stress patterns, and syllabic structures. These transformations are not random but are governed by systematic linguistic principles. Consequently, morphonological variability serves as an important indicator of derivational relationships and contributes to the organization of lexical systems.

The study of morphonological phenomena has been addressed by numerous scholars, including I.A. Baudouin de Courtenay, N.S. Trubetzkoy, R.I. Avanesov, A.A. Reformatsky, V.V. Vinogradov, E.A. Zemskaya, and others. Their research established the theoretical foundations for understanding morphonological alternations within derivational processes.

The purpose of this article is to investigate morphonological

variability in word-formation relations and determine its role in the development of the Russian lexical system.

The objectives of the research are:

To define the concept of morphonological variability.

To identify the principal types of morphonological changes in derivation.

To analyze their functions in word formation.

To determine their role in lexical development.

Materials and Methods

The research material consists of derivational pairs and word-formation chains selected from contemporary Russian dictionaries, derivational dictionaries, and literary texts.

The following methods were employed:

descriptive analysis;

structural-linguistic analysis;

mophonological analysis;

comparative method;

contextual interpretation;

synthesis and generalization.

The study focuses primarily on productive derivational models in modern Russian.

Theoretical Foundations of Morphonology

Morphology is a branch of linguistics that investigates the interaction between phonological and morphological structures. The term was introduced to describe phonological changes that occur in connection with morphological processes.

According to modern linguistic theory, morphonology studies:

alternations of sounds within morphemes;

stress shifts;

truncation and extension of stems;

modifications resulting from affixation.

Morphonological phenomena are especially significant in derivational morphology because the formation of new words often leads to structural modifications in the motivating base.

For example:

рука → ручка

друг → дружба

лицо → личный

In each case, the root undergoes phonological transformation while preserving its semantic identity.

Thus, morphonological variability serves as a bridge between phonetic realization and morphological structure.

Morphonological Variability as a Linguistic Phenomenon

Morphonological variability refers to systematic changes occurring within morphemes during word formation.

These changes may affect:

consonants;

vowels;

stress placement;

syllabic structure;

morphemic boundaries.

The variability arises because derivational processes require adaptation between lexical bases and derivational affixes.

For example:

Base Word	Derived Word	Type of Change
рука	ручка	k → č
друг	дружба	g → ž
лицо	личный	s → š
свет	освещение	stem modification

Such alternations represent regular patterns rather than accidental deviations.

Morphonological variability therefore contributes to the systematic organization of derivational structures.

Types of Morphonological Alternations in Word Formation

Consonant Alternations

Consonant alternations constitute one of the most productive morphonological processes in Russian.

Examples include:

к → ч

рука → ручка

река → речка

г → ж

друг → дружба

книга → книжный

х → ш

ухо → ушной

смех → смешной

These alternations facilitate phonetic compatibility between roots and suffixes.

Vowel Alternations

Vowel modifications frequently accompany derivational processes.

Examples:

собирать → сбор

выбирать → выбор

забирать → забор

In these cases, vowel changes are associated with derivational restructuring.

Such alternations increase the flexibility of the derivational system.

Stress Alternations

Stress shifts represent another important type of morphonological variability.

Examples:

го́род → городско́й

мо́лодость → молодóй

Stress modifications often signal derivational relationships and contribute to lexical differentiation.

Stem Truncation

Certain derivational processes involve the shortening of the motivating stem.

Examples:

специалист → спец

университет → универ

Although more common in colloquial speech, stem truncation

contributes to lexical innovation and language economy.

Stem Expansion

In contrast, some derivational formations involve the extension of the base through additional phonological material.

Examples:

звук → звучание

бег → беговой

Such expansions facilitate the integration of derivational suffixes into lexical structures.

Functions of Morphonological Variability in Word Formation

Morphonological variability performs several important linguistic functions.

Structural Function

The primary function is to maintain structural coherence between roots and affixes.

For example:

рука + -к-а

would produce an awkward phonetic sequence without alternation.

The form ручка is therefore more phonologically acceptable.

Distinctive Function

Morphonological changes help distinguish lexical units from one another.

Examples:

друг → дружба

круг → кружок

The alternations create formally distinct words while preserving semantic connections.

Integrative Function

Morphonological processes integrate lexical bases into productive derivational models.

They enable roots to combine efficiently with diverse affixes.

This function supports the productivity of the word-formation system.

Semantic Function

Although primarily formal, morphonological variability may contribute indirectly to semantic differentiation.

For instance:

лицо → личность

лицо → личный

The derived forms acquire distinct semantic functions despite sharing a common root.

Morphonological Variability and Lexical Development

The Russian lexical system evolves through continuous derivational activity.

Morphonological variability contributes to this development in several ways:

Vocabulary Expansion

New lexical units emerge through productive derivational models involving morphonological modifications.

Examples:

цифровой → цифровизация

интернет → интернетизация

These formations enrich modern vocabulary.

Adaptation of Borrowings

Foreign lexical items often undergo morphonological adaptation.

Examples:

блог → блогер

скан → сканирование

Such adaptations facilitate the integration of borrowed words into Russian morphology.

Terminological Development

Scientific and technological terminology frequently relies on derivational processes involving morphonological changes.

Examples:

анализ → аналитический

система → системный

This contributes to the growth of specialized vocabulary.

Morphonological Variability in Contemporary Russian

Modern Russian demonstrates increasing morphonological activity due to technological, social, and cultural changes.

Digital communication has generated numerous new lexical formations:

блогер

стример

контентщик

маркетинговый

These words illustrate the continued productivity of derivational mechanisms.

Contemporary language users actively create and interpret new formations based on established morphonological patterns.

Consequently, morphonological variability remains a vital factor in lexical innovation.

DISCUSSION

The analysis confirms that morphonological variability represents an essential component of derivational processes in Russian. The interaction between phonological and morphological structures enables the language to maintain both systematicity and flexibility.

Morphonological alternations are not isolated phenomena but integral elements of linguistic organization. They facilitate communication by ensuring phonetic harmony and structural consistency.

The study also demonstrates that morphonological variability supports lexical productivity by allowing roots to participate in multiple derivational patterns. This capability is particularly important in contemporary language, where rapid social and technological changes require continuous lexical adaptation.

Furthermore, morphonological processes contribute to language economy by optimizing the formal structure of derived words.

CONCLUSION

The investigation of morphonological variability in word-formation relations allows the following conclusions to be drawn:

Morphonological variability is a systematic phenomenon

arising from the interaction of phonological and morphological structures.

The principal types of variability include consonant alternations, vowel alternations, stress shifts, stem truncation, and stem expansion.

Morphonological processes perform structural, distinctive, integrative, and semantic functions.

They contribute significantly to lexical expansion and derivational productivity.

Morphonological variability facilitates the adaptation of new lexical units and supports the dynamic development of the Russian lexical system.

Contemporary Russian demonstrates a high degree of morphonological activity, particularly in technological and sociocultural vocabulary.

Therefore, morphonological variability should be regarded as one of the fundamental mechanisms ensuring the stability, flexibility, and developmental potential of the Russian language.

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