

Maiden, Martin. 1992. Irregularity as a determinant of morphological change. *Journal of Linguistics* 28. 285-312.

The article proposes that the irregularity inherent in allomorphy can be appreciated as “an active, abstract structural property of morphological systems”. Morphological irregularity cannot be accounted for purely in terms of frequency. The aim of the article is “to explore not the reason that alternations may be retained in or lost from the grammar but to account for the role of abstract patterns of paradigmatic irregularity or morphological change”.

There are several morphological phenomena that can be described using these abstract morphological patterns.

The “n-pattern” found in Italian: Singular and 3rd Plural vs. the rest of the paradigm is initially based on the stress pattern (stem-stressed form vs. ending-stressed ones). But this pattern works for the palatalization of stem-final consonants: a historically later variety of palatalization yielded palatal consonants throughout the paradigm *except* the n-pattern in the Subjunctive: there consonants remained hard.

The second morphological pattern concerns the 1st Singular and 3rd Plural and works for the Present Indicative: there consonants remain hard as well. Novel allomorphy is introduced according to the n-pattern in the Subjunctive and according to the 1st Sg, 3rd Pl vs. the rest in the Present Indicative.

In French, the morphological process of diphthong-levelling favours the following property of conjugation: all first-conjugation verbs have their diphthongs (initially – only stressed) being levelled throughout the paradigm (sometimes the diphthong spreads, sometimes one-vowel syllables are restored).

The article suggests the following explanation: “speakers, faced with conflicting typological evidence in lexical roots, resort to a variety of strategies whose fundamental aim is to anchor as firmly as possible in the grammar the various alternation patterns with which they are confronted. One strategy is to associate allomorphy with another major (and semantically arbitrary) morphological class, namely conjugation. Another strategy... consists in speakers' seeking to identify common distributional patterns underlying the range of phonologically disparate allomorphy which they encounter”.