THE DEFINITION OF THE ROOT BETWEEN HISTORY AND TYPOLOGY

Abstract

The term “root” is polysemous. The historical antecedent of a set of etymologically related forms is a diachronic root (D-root); the input form for productive word-formation rules is a synchronic root (S-root). The definition of D-root is generally agreed, but the notion of S-root is fairly controversial. Depending on the cases, the S-root can be defined as: i) any lexical morpheme, irrespective of the type of morpheme; ii) a primary lexical morpheme that coincides with a word-form minus inflections and, specifically, with a primary verb stem; iii) a primary lexical morpheme that structurally differs from a word-form minus inflections and, specifically, from a simple verb stem.

The comparison between Adjectival encoding in Latin and in the Sanskrit language of the Rig-Veda shows that only hypothesis iii) is acceptable from a typological point of view. In Latin, three classes of simple lexical morphemes are found (noun, verb and adjective), and the prototypical Adjective is a primary adjectival stem; in the Rig-Veda, only two classes of simple lexical morphemes are found, and the prototypical Adjective is a derived stem built on a verbal root of quality meaning. Therefore, if the simple verb stem is the simple lexical morpheme that builds the prototypical Verb (in addition to some nouns and adjectives), the root is the simple lexical morpheme that builds the prototypical Verb and the prototypical Adjective (in addition to some Nouns). Some notes on the consequences of this typological definition of the root in Indo-European linguistics close the paper.