

Towards a Typology of overabundance

The paper is couched in the canonical approach to morphological typology (Corbett 2005, 2007a,b). In this approach, paradigms are canonical if they conform to all the conditions stated in table 1.

Table 1 Canonical Inflection (Corbett 2007a: 9; cf. also Corbett 2007b: 23-24)

	COMPARISON ACROSS <i>CELLS</i> OF A LEXEME	COMPARISON ACROSS <i>LEXEMES</i>
COMPOSITION/STRUCTURE (\approx means of exponence)	same	same
LEXICAL MATERIAL (\approx shape of stem)	same	different
INFLECTIONAL MATERIAL (\approx shape of inflection)	different	same
OUTCOME (\approx shape of inflected forms)	different	different

There are then several ways in which paradigms may deviate from canonicity; the possible deviations can be seen within a paradigm, i.e., by comparing forms in different cells of a single lexeme's paradigm, or between paradigms, i.e., by comparing forms in the corresponding cell(s) of different lexemes.

The different kinds of deviations from canonicity are presented in Tables 2 and 3 (from Corbett 2007b).

Table 2 Deviations from canonical behavior in single lexemes

	canonical behaviour	deviant behaviour	type of deviation
COMPOSITION/STRUCTURE (of the inflected <i>word</i>)	same	different	fused exponence periphrasis
LEXICAL MATERIAL (\approx shape of <i>stem</i>)	same	different	alternations suppletion
INFLECTIONAL MATERIAL (\approx shape of <i>affix</i>)	different	same	syncretism uninflectability

Table 3 Deviations from canonical behavior across lexemes

	canonical behaviour	deviant behaviour	type of deviation
COMPOSITION/STRUCTURE (of the inflected <i>word</i>)	same	different	defectiveness overdifferentiation anti-periphrasis
LEXICAL MATERIAL (\approx shape of <i>stem</i>)	different	same	homonymy
INFLECTIONAL MATERIAL (\approx shape of <i>affix</i>)	same	different	inflectional classes heteroclisys deponency

This presentation will address a further kind of deviation, called **overabundance**, which occurs when a cell in a paradigm is filled by two synonymous forms which realize the same set of morphosyntactic properties. A very well-known example is given in (1):

- (1) English 'burn.PST' = *burnt* / *burned*

Overabundance does not appear in Tables 2 and 3. There is a question about where this phenomenon might appear. In Table 3, it should probably appear alongside with defectiveness, as a deviation in the composition of a paradigm that can be detected by comparing paradigms from different lexemes: where Lexeme x has a single form in a given cell, Lexeme y has two (or more) forms in the same cell. In a certain sense, overabundance is a mirror image of defectiveness: while defective paradigms lack forms in one or more cells, overabundant paradigms have more than one form in one or more cells.

The forms that inhabit the same cell of a paradigm can be called cell-mates, as proposed by Thornton (to appear). This term is to be preferred to the term *doublents*, which is sometimes used, because there can be more than two cell-mates in a given cell. Examples of such overcrowded cells are given in (2):

- (2) Latin *fecērunt / fecērunt / fecēre* 'do.3PL.PRF.IND'
 MS Arabic *sāriqūn / sāriqāt / saraqa / surrāq / sawarīqu* 'thief.PL'
 (sg. *sāriq*; Kaye 2007:235)

It is not possible to insert overabundance in Table 2, as the presence of cell-mates adds a dimension to the ones considered in Table 2. In fact, a specific form in a set of cell-mates can differ from its mate(s) in terms of all the factors considered in the rows of Table 2: composition or structure of cells (a formula that in Corbett's system refers to the “means of exponence” by which a cell is filled, cf. Corbett 2007b: 24), lexical material and inflectional material. Examples for all these cases are given in Table 4:

Table 4

	Type of deviation	Examples
COMPOSITION/STRUCTURE (≈ means of exponence)	forms built according to different means of exponence in the same cell	Dutch <i>drukste / meest drukke</i> 'busy:SUPERL' Arabic <i>sāriqūn / surrāq</i> 'thief.PL'
LEXICAL MATERIAL (≈ shape of stem)	forms built on two different stems in the same cell	Italian <i>devo / debbo</i> 'must.1SG.PRS.IND' English <i>cacti / cactuses</i> 'cactus.PL'
INFLECTIONAL MATERIAL (≈ shape of inflection)	forms with two different inflectional endings in the same cell	Latin <i>fecērunt / fecērunt / fecēre</i> 'do.3PL.PRF.IND'

The two Dutch Superlatives in Table 4 differ from each other because one form is suffixed while the other is periphrastic¹; the two Arabic noun plurals differ from each other because the first is realized

¹ Reviewer n. 1 observes: “I don't understand the role (and the relevance) of periphrastic constructions in the whole picture”. Following the suggestion by the organizers to revise the abstract to take into account the comments of the reviewers, I will try to clarify the mention of periphrasis here. Table 4 offers examples of cell-mates that differ from one another along the three dimensions identified by Corbett as relevant to classify types of deviant, non-canonical behaviour in paradigms. As shown in Table 2, periphrasis is a type of deviation from canonicity which has to do with the structure of the material in a given cell: canonical inflectional forms are non-periphrastic, and periphrastic forms are non-canonical. In a pair of cell-mates in which one mate is periphrastic and the other one isn't, there are two kinds of deviations from canonicity: having two forms realizing the same cell is a deviation, and having a periphrastic form realizing the cell is another deviation.

by suffixing *-ūn* to the singular, while the second is a “broken” plural, realized by fitting the stem in a specific prosodic template with a prespecified vocalic melody.² The other examples in Table 4 show cases of cell-mates built on different stems of a lexeme, or by using different inflectional endings after one and the same stem.

Canonical overabundance is defined as a situation in which two or more forms that realize the same cell (i.e., the same set of morphosyntactic features) in a lexeme's paradigm can be used interchangeably, with the choice of one or the other form subject to no condition. As is expected in the canonical approach, the definition is likely to be matched by no actual case.³ In many cases two cell-mates will differ according to some kind of condition concerning dimensions of language variation, or according to grammatical conditions.

Contrasts between relatively unconditioned (and therefore more canonical) overabundance and overabundance conditioned by some dimension of variation can be illustrated by the different sets of cell-mates realizing 1SG.PRS.IND of some Italian verbs, listed in (3):

(3) a. *possiedo / posseggo* 'possess.1SG.PRS.IND'

highly canonical; both forms are attested with almost equal frequency in contemporary Italian, and do not seem subject to diaphasic, diastratic or diatopic conditioning

b. *chiedo / chieggo* 'ask.1SG.PRS.IND'

non-canonical: *chieggo* is extinct in contemporary Italian, and is therefore diachronically conditioned, being found only in texts produced up to the beginning of the 20th century

c. *vado / vo* 'go.1SG.PRS.IND'

non-canonical: *vo* in contemporary Italian is used only by speakers of the Tuscan variety, or in poetry and other text types subject to metrical constraints (proverbs, songs) and is therefore diatopically and diaphasically conditioned

Contrasts between sets of unconditioned cell-mates vs. sets conditioned by some kind of system-internal linguistic factor can be illustrated by data on double Preterit forms in English verbs (Quirk 1970, Kempson & Quirk 1971)⁴:

(4) a. *burnt / burned*

highly canonical; both forms used in similar measure in all kinds of contexts

b. *spoilt / spoiled, dreamt / dreamed*

non canonical, aspectually conditioned: (particularly in British English) *-t* forms are more likely in perfective contexts, *-ed* forms are more likely in imperfective / durative contexts (Quirk 1970)

c. *wet / wetted*

non canonical, semantically conditioned: according to Kempson & Quirk (1971: 551) *wet* is used

² Reviewer n. 1 observes: “the abstract does not touch upon [...] the issue of inflectional class changes”. This issue was not explicitly mentioned in the abstract for lack of space: however, many examples (such as the Arabic and the English ones in (2) and (4)) involve cell-mates which differ because they follow different inflectional classes (strong vs. weak verbs in English, different types of sound vs. broken plurals in Arabic). Overabundance in a cell is often a stage along the path of inflectional class change: a lexeme starts as a regular (i.e., non-overabundant) lexeme of class x, then in an intermediate stage it displays some inflected forms that follow class x and some that follow class y (constituting pairs of cell-mates), and eventually (often, but not always) forms of class x go out of usage, only forms of class y are used and class change is completed.

³ CORBETT (2007a: 9) observed: “The canonical instances, that is, the best, clearest, indisputable (the ones closely matching the canon), are unlikely to be frequent. Rather, they are likely to be rare or even nonexistent”.

⁴ These forms can also show contrasts due to factors of variation: for example, *leaped* is more used in the US and *leapt* in the UK.

both in the general sense 'moistened' and in the more restricted sense 'urinated', *wetted* is used only in the sense 'moistened'; some speakers, however, don't have this distinction (Grev Corbett, personal communication): for these speakers, then, *wet* / *wetted* are rather canonical cell-mates.⁵

In the presentation, results of a preliminary survey on the extent of canonical and non-canonical overabundance in the world's languages will be presented.

Topics that will be addressed include:

- a) word classes in which overabundance is attested;
- b) correlations between overabundance and morphosyntactic features;
- c) correlations between overabundance and morphomic partition classes.
- d) correlations between overabundance and frequency.

Concerning a), preliminary data have shown cases of overabundance in verbs, nouns, adjectives, pronouns (cf. Cappellaro 2010); data on possessives and demonstratives are currently being investigated.

Concerning b), certain feature specifications seem to be particularly prone to overabundance; for example, in nouns overabundance is common in the plural, while rare in the singular.

Concerning c), Thornton (to appear) has shown that in Italian verb paradigms overabundance occurs in cell that belong to independently established morphomic partition classes; it is a question for future research whether this is a general tendency or a language-specific fact.

Concerning d), data must still be studied carefully. The few data that have been studied so far show contrasting tendencies: while in Italian verbs overabundance seems to occur in fairly frequent verbs, in Italian pronouns it occurs rather in the least frequent cells (Cappellaro 2010).⁶

References

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⁵ Reviewer n. 1 observes: "the abstract does not touch upon important issues which have been hotly debated in the literature (for instance parallel forms like *brothers* / *brethren*)". In as far as *brothers* / *brethren* can be considered cell-mates, they would be highly non-canonical mates, heavily semantically conditioned. But I would prefer to consider *brothers* and *brethren* as the plural forms of two different lexical items, which are homophonous in their singular form *brother*, because the semantic difference between 'male sibling' and 'fellow member of a profession, society or sect' is big enough to recognize two different items. But of course the border between homophony and polysemy is indeed hotly debated in the literature, and a typology of overabundance will have to address this problem.

⁶ The relation between frequency and overabundance in Italian verb paradigms has been investigated, after the submission of this abstract, by Thornton (2010).