29. Markedness

1. Introduction

Many morphological phenomena tend to consist of polar opposed pairs, e.g., grammatical (inflectional) categories such as singular-plural, masculine-feminine, active-passive, present-past, and word-formative relations like English do-redo, host-hostess, accented-unaccented, etc. In such binary oppositions (contrasts), moreover, the poles are not usually mere opposites: typically there is an asymmetry, such that one pole may be more specialized, more precise, more constrained, less general and more complex than the other. In such cases, the more general category is unmarked, the specialized one marked (in the examples given here, the order is unmarked-marked). This is related to observations such as the following: in Spanish dictionaries, adjectives are listed in masculine singular since the feminine and the plural are considered to be special uses; the active voice is more common in English than the passive; do and host are simpler in form and wider in range of meaning than redo and hostess.

Markedness is correlated with the asymmetric relationship between two choices, and is applicable to all areas of morphology (synchronic and diachronic, first and second language acquisition, typology and universals) as well as to all other domains of language structure (phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, etc.). For more details, see Waugh & Lafford (1994).

2. Markedness in phonology

The general discussion of markedness originated in the 1930's, in the writings of the Prague School structuralists, who applied it first to phonology (see Trubetzkoy 1931; 1939; Jakobson & Pomorska 1980: 93—98; Jakobson & Waugh 1987: 92—95). The essential insight is that phonemes are differentiated by binary distinctive features, e.g., /p/—/b/ [−voiced] [+voiced] and /f/—/m/ [−nasal] [+nasal], in which the two poles are not on equal footing with each other: one is marked (+voiced), the other unmarked. The markedness of voicing and nasality is correlated with the addition of the acoustic characteristic which introduces a complexity; it is also correlated with various factors such as universals and child language acquisition (see 4.1 below). In addition, the unmarked value of a feature has wider distribution than the marked one; for example, there are usually more (unmarked) oral consonants than (marked) nasal ones in a language (e.g., English has voiceless and voiced stops /p/-/b/, /t/-/d/, /k/-/g/, but only voiced
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nasals /nl/, /ln/, /ly/); the unmarked phoneme tends to have more allophones than the marked one, e.g., in English, voiceless stops have both aspirated and unaspirated allophones, whereas voiced ones are only unaspirated; unmarked categories tend to have a greater functional load (they distinguish and identify a greater number of words) and higher text (token) frequencies than marked ones. Moreover, some cases of neutralization tend to exhibit markedness: in those contexts where only one member of the pair can occur and the resulting neutralization is not determined by some feature of the context (internally conditioned neutralization), it is the unmarked member which appears (e.g., in German only the voiceless obstruents are found in word-final position, although in other positions both voiceless and voiced can occur). However, when the neutralization is externally conditioned by some feature of the context, markedness does not determine what appears (e.g., in Spanish, all syllable-final nasals are homorganic with the place of articulation of the following consonant: so, the indefinite article spelled un is realized as [un] before beso ‘kiss’, [un] before saco ‘jacket’ and [u] before gato ‘cat’).

3. Markedness in morphology

At the same time as markedness was being explored in phonology, it was also applied to morphology, where there are some obvious binary relations (Jakobson 1932, 1936; Hjelmslev 1971 [1933]; Brøndal 1940, 1943; see also Greenberg 1966; Andersen 1989; Grozdanović 1989). For example, in the Russian verb, there is a set of unmarked-marked pairs, such as singular-plural, imperfective-perfective, present-past (Jakobson 1932).

From the early 1930’s on, various criteria for markedness have been defined for morphology:

3.1. Markedness and isomorphism

The criterion for markedness which is the most discussed for morphology is that of isomorphism (iconicity; cf. Art. 30) between form and content. Formal complexity generally corresponds to conceptual complexity (Jakobson 1939): in general, elements that are marked on one linguistic level (phonology) are used to express marked forms on another level (morphology). For example, an unmarked term will tend either to have zero expression (a zero morpheme; cf. Art. 45) or to be simpler in form than the marked term. Some examples from English and German are: the singular of the noun has no overt expression (cat) but the plural has the marker -s (cats); words with derivational affixes are generally marked vs. their non-derived counterparts (e.g., *hostess is marked vs. host); the phonologically marked front rounded vowels /y/ and /o/ (indicated by an umlaut – [ü] and [ö] – which are marked because the combination of rounding and frontness is not frequent in the world’s languages) are associated with the morphologically marked categories of plural, comparative, superlative, and past subjunctive (e.g., Germ. Buch-Bücher, hart-härter-härteste, hatte-hätte); an English active sentence has a simpler verb form and lacks the by-phrase of the passive, and the verb do is used for (marked) negative, emphatic, and interrogative predicates, but not for the unmarked neutral predicate.

These last examples show markedness assimilation: unmarked categories tend to occur in unmarked syntactic contexts, marked categories in marked syntactic contexts (cf. Battistella 1990: 69–116).

Of course, there are exceptions to this isomorphic principle in various languages, but these are rarer. Moreover, they seem to be prone to instability since many types of morphological change may (re)introduce isomorphism. Thus, in those few cases where there is an overt morpheme for an unmarked category vs. a zero for a marked category, the tendency is to replace the zero with an overt morpheme in the marked category or to eliminate the overt morpheme in the unmarked category. The replacement of zero can be exemplified by Russian, where some of the marked genitive plurals have no overt suffix, but the unmarked nominative singular does, and where many dialects have created an overt genitive plural: nominative singular jabolko ‘apple’ (-o is the nominative singular morpheme) vs. genitive plural jablok, but dialectal genitive plural form jabolko. The elimination of an overt morpheme can be exemplified by the fact that in some languages a suffix for the unmarked third singular has been reanalyzed either as part of the root of the verb or as a marker of some other category such as tense – e.g., substandard English I says, you says, he says, where the -s has become a marker of the present tense vs. the -d for the past (for the unmarkedness of the third singular see also 5 below). Such changes
have led to claims about the naturalness of the iconic relation between zero expression and unmarkedness, and theories of natural morphology have placed emphasis on the interrelation of markedness and iconicity (see Art. 30 and 31).

It should, however, be noted that there has been some confusion in this area due to the closeness of the terms – being marked (markiert) and having a marker (merkmalt) – and to the fact that the terminology may sometimes overlap: a marked category may be said to have a mark or to carry a marking or to be marked for a given feature (e.g., *woman* is marked for [+female]), just as a marker can also be called a mark or a marking or a form can be said to be marked for a given category if that category is overtly expressed (e.g., *cats* is marked for the marked plural and *hits* is marked for the unmarked third person singular). Collocations such as "unmarkiertes Merkmal" ("unmarked mark", Jakobson 1974; see also Mayerthaler 1981: 4–11) have also arisen, attesting to the confusion when marked categories have no overt marker and unmarked categories do.

3.2. Markedness and morphophonemics

Markedness has also been used in morphophonemics (cf. Art. 35), both implicitly and explicitly. Thus, the allomorphy represented by *cat/cats* has been characterized as unmarked vs. the marked *foot/feet* for the following reasons: non-alternation of the root (it remains *cat*), representation of the morphological relation by a segmentable, agglutinative morpheme (*cat-s*), and phonological (i.e., regular) conditioning of the allomorphy in the former vs. the latter (the plural is realized as [s] in *cats*, [z] in *dogs*, and [z] in *horses* for reasons having to do with the phonological system of English, but the alternation between *foot* and *feet* is due to the morphology). In fact, there is a general assumption that regularity and phonological conditioning are unmarked and irregularity and non-phonological conditioning (e.g., morphological conditioning) are marked. Thus, if both the unmarked and marked terms of an opposition have allomorphy, there is more morphological regularity of the marked term (less allomorphy, fewer different forms); in German, for example, the marked dative plurals uniformly have *n* or *-en*, while the dative singular varies with gender and declensional class. There is also diachronic and synchronic levelling in child language, pidgins and creoles, dialects, and informal speech, leading to regularization (e.g., *English* *foots* rather than *feet*); regular forms have greater lexical (type) frequency (the vast majority of English nouns take the *-s* plural and only a small minority the irregular plurals); regular forms are often the productive ones (e.g., new nouns coming into English normally take *-s* as in *spurtick*); in language change, the regular formation provides the pivotal terms for analogical reformations (e.g., in English, the irregular plural *brethren* was replaced by regular *brothers*); after analogical reformation, the irregular form may take on special meanings or functions (brethren has taken on a new, specialized – marked – meaning); and in pidgins and creoles, irregular forms are often dropped. Considerations such as these have been incorporated in natural morphology in which naturalness is tied to markedness and regularity (see Art. 31, 32, 33, 47 and 48).

3.3. Markedness and distribution

There is a general principle whereby the unmarked category is the one with wider paradigmatic and syntagmatic distribution and thus many of the asymmetries of morphological systems and usage can be explained by markedness. In terms of paradigms, there is a general principle whereby marked categories tend to have fewer subvarieties than unmarked ones. This is known as Brandler's principle of compensation or the tendency not to combine marked categories together (see Brandler 1940; 1943). This is exemplified by the following: syncretism / syncretization (cf. Art. 66), in which the marked term totally lacks categories present in the unmarked term (e.g., in the English pronouns there are gender differences in the singular he, she, it but not in the plural they); deactivation (deactive categories) in which the marked term has only some of the categories that the unmarked term has, i.e., there are gaps in the paradigm (e.g., French has present indicative, present subjunctive and future indicative but no future subjunctive), or, instead of a morphological category, there is a more complex periphrastic one, made up of two or more words (e.g., future tense and passive voice in English are periphrastic but present tense and active voice are not – will hit, *is hit vs. hits*). Furthermore, this can be used as evidence for defining hierarchical relations / ranking between categories: number dominates gender in English and thus gender is
The unmarked term is also syntagmatically more diversified. One of the most striking results of this greater diversity — and one of the first to be noted (see Jakobson 1932; Hjelmslev 1971 [1933]) — is that of the distribution of meaning between marked and unmarked categories and in particular the more limited range of meaning of the marked term and wider range of the unmarked. Thus, while the marked term means the presence of a certain property *A* (e.g., the English past tense is marked and signals past time), the unmarked has two major types of meaning: (a) non-*A* in its basic (nuclear) meaning (e.g., the unmarked present may signal non-past as in *John is here right now, John is coming tomorrow*), and (b) no signal of *A* at all (the present is atemporal as in *the earth is round*). In addition, there is a minor type: (c) signaling *A* (the present is used for past time as in the historical present — see 5.4 below). Word-formation may also exhibit the same types of asymmetries, such as Fr. *acteur* meaning either ‘male actor’ (type a) or ‘actor’ (type b) vs. *actrice* meaning only ‘female actress’; Eng. *host* can be used for both males and females, whereas *hostess* cannot (e.g., *your hostess tonight are Mr. and Mrs. Smith*). Such correlations are not unique to morphology but arise also in the semantic analysis of other levels of language. For example, in the lexicon, for antonyms such as *accented-unaccented, accent* is both the opposite of *unaccented* and the name for the entire parameter (*accentedness*) (Wuah 1982: 308), and so forth. This tendency to use the unmarked category to represent both the entire category and the opposite of the marked category is pervasive in human thinking, e.g., in mathematical and logical symbolism, -5 is always negative, but 5 can mean both the absolute value of 5 and +5 (Jakobson & Pomorska 1966: 25).

Directly correlated with the greater semantic diversity of the unmarked term is the fact that it also appears in a wider array of syntagmatic environments, that is, it has greater freedom of occurrence. The following types of correlations with markedness have been found for singular-plural: wider distribution of the unmarked term (in English the plural is used in fewer morphological and syntactic contexts than the singular — e.g., in compounds typically the singular is used even if the meaning is plural, as in *owner-occupied, language laboratory*); facultative use of the marked term (in Korean, there is optional use of the plural form and thus the singular form is usually understood as singular unless the context demands a plural meaning, just as English *host* normally refers to men but can be used for women); contextual neutralization — only the unmarked term may appear in some contexts (Turkish, the singular form of the noun is used when a cardinal number precedes it); dominance of the unmarked term over the marked (in Spanish the masculine gender of *los padres* can be used to mean both ‘the parents’ and ‘the fathers’ but *las madres* can only refer to ‘the mothers’); agreement *a potiori* (a French adjective agreeing with both a masculine and a feminine noun is put in the masculine plural). The greater distribution of the unmarked term is also to be correlated with its higher frequency (e.g., in text counts of French, the nominal singular is more frequent than the plural; but see Schwartz 1980, who shows that text frequency does not always correlate with markedness).

4. Markedness and cross-linguistic comparison

Many linguists claim that there is a markedness connection between language structure, types of changes, the universal and implicational distribution of categories within and across languages, language typology, the order of acquisition by children and of loss by aphasics, and the facts of second language acquisition.

4.1. Language universals, child language, and universal grammar

The connection between cross-linguistic comparison and markedness relations was shown originally for phonology by Trubetzkoj (1939) and Jakobson (1941; 1958). Such comparison leads to the recognition that certain markedness relations may tend to be universal (absolute universals): nasality, non-present tense, and passive voice tend always to be marked. In addition, there are types of linguistic systems which seem to occur with great frequency upon which principles of dependency can be formulated. The most important is asymmetric implication (implica-
tional universals): the presence of \( x \) implies the presence of \( y \), but \( y \) does not imply \( x \) and therefore \( y \) is more basic (Jakobson 1958 – see also Art. 115 and 116). In many cases, \( y \) is unmarked and \( x \) is marked. For example, the presence of a gender distinction in the marked plural implies the presence of that same distinction in the unmarked singular, but not vice versa; the presence of a dual implies the presence of a plural but not vice versa. Such findings have also been crucial for predicting types and orders of morphological changes. In particular, the implicational universals mean that no language can acquire a marked category unless it acquires the unmarked one before (or concurrently); and no language can lose the unmarked category without losing the marked one.

Universals and typological relations, especially implicational universals, also have explanatory power for first-language acquisition by the child and for aphasic dissolution (Jakobson 1941). For example, children tend to learn first the unmarked category and only later the marked one (they go from simpler to more complex systems, e.g., singular is learned before plural); in like fashion, aphasics lose first the marked category and only later the unmarked one.

The association of marked terms with lesser universality and later learning by the child has also received renewed attention recently in generative grammar, particularly with respect to the relation between universal grammar, which is made up of those grammatical phenomena which are found in all languages, and core grammar (Battistella 1996). Universal grammar is assumed to determine a set of possible core grammars for languages by setting parameters, each with a finite number of values. These parameters may be connected through hierarchical relations of markedness or various implicational or preferential relations. Systems that fall within core grammar constitute the unmarked phenomena while more marked elements are found in the periphery (e.g., unmarked use of prepositions with an object, as in *he came in the room* vs. marked use of prepositions as adverb-like elements, as in *he came in*). In the acquisition of grammar in the child, universal grammar is assumed to be innate, with unmarked options for parameters being preferred and learned first, the marked periphery of the system being learned later (Chomsky 1981).

4.2. Second language acquisition

Markedness has also led to various proposals for second language acquisition (see Rutherford 1982). From an interlinguistic viewpoint, for example, the Markedness Differential Hypothesis proposes that the degree of difficulty in second language acquisition may be attributed to the similarities and differences in typological markedness between the first and the second language and that relative areas of difficulty in the target language can be predicted for learners with a particular first language (Eckman 1985).

The intralinguistic view of the role of markedness in second language acquisition is also based on linguistic universals, whereby unmarked structures are acquired early, and marked structures later. In this view, markedness serves as an explanation for the development of grammatical patterns in the interlanguage (intermediate stages in the acquisition of a second language) of adult learners. For instance, adult second language learners of Spanish acquire the present tense before the past and the indicative mood before the subjunctive. It is interesting to note that in interlanguage, just as for children, the unmarked forms often substitute for the marked categories before the latter are acquired. In addition, just as for aphasia, second language attrition studies have found a relation between order of acquisition and language loss: in learners of English, the last question forms learned (*whose*) are the first to be unlearned.

5. Controversies about markedness

It must be pointed out that there have been some controversies about the various criteria for markedness discussed here. In particular, there is a cluster of issues on which there is no general agreement: Which criteria are necessary and/or sufficient to show markedness? Is one criterion all-important or is there more than one? If more than one, how do they interrelate? What if the criteria give conflicting results? Are the criteria weighted or causally linked? Are they absolute or probabilistic? Do the same criteria hold in all areas of language? For example, each of the following criteria has been claimed to be the one which defines markedness: wider semantic distribution; wider syntactic distribution; text (token) frequency; lexical (type) frequency; zero expression and formal complexity; order of first language acquisition; implicational relations;
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neutralization. Given this, there is no small confusion as to what the term markedness actually means.

5.1. Markedness and non-binary systems

While the use of markedness is widespread for such obviously binary categories as singular-plural, its application to ternary and larger systems has led to more uncertainty (just as in phonology, where relations such as /pl/-/fl/-/kl/ or /fl/-/fl/-/fl/ have also led to doubts about the application of both binarism and markedness). Some linguists have claimed that all inflectional (and phonological) systems can be characterized in terms of binary relations of markedness (Jakobson & Pomorska 1980; van Schooneveld 1978) and that for ternary systems there are two markedness relations, creating hierarchies of markedness. They have discerned two types of structures. In some cases, there is one unmarked term opposed to two marked ones, each with a different mark. For example, tense systems with present-past-future oppose the unmarked present to the marked past and the marked future (each with a different mark). In other cases, there is one unmarked term opposed to two marked terms, which are then further differentiated into marked and unmarked. For example, unmarked present vs. marked past, itself split into unmarked imperfective vs. marked perfective (perfective).

Person in the verb or the pronoun is a particularly interesting example. Third person is assumed to be unmarked for the following reasons: it is often the one with zero expression; it combines with other categories such as definiteness, proximity, gender; it is used for many different types of subjects (definite and indefinite, human, animate and inanimate, nominal and pronominal, personal and impersonal) as well as when there is no subject, and it can encompass first and second person referents in its general usage (e.g., where the subject is one, as in One should never tell lies). First and second person, on the other hand, are marked because they generally have an overt marker, do not combine as freely with other categories (although first can combine with inclusive/exclusive and second with formal/familiar), are used with definite, human, pronominal subjects (but not other types) and cannot encompass third person referents in their usage. Within first and second, first is marked because it inevitably refers to the speaker, whereas second person may sometimes refer to the speaker, as when one talks to oneself, and, as well, it can have various generic uses (Jakobson 1957; Benveniste 1946; Lyons 1968: 276–278).

For even larger systems, some linguists have assumed that there is a set of grammatical features, and that one term of the system is unmarked (e.g., English simple present tense, Russian nominative case), the others singly marked (e.g., simple past, present progressive, instrumental, accusative), doubly marked (e.g., past progressive, dative), and so forth (Jakobson 1936; 1959: 490ff.)

5.2. Markedness, hierarchies, prototypes

Other linguists claim that a continuum of markedness from least to most marked is relevant for some (or all) non-binary relations, such that there are degrees of markedness (relative markedness) rather than numbers of marks (absolute markedness) (see Croft 1990: 95–123). The continua that have been proposed include: singular-plural-dual, positive-comparative-suplative, masculine-feminine-neuter, present-past-future. Person (cf. Art. 96) has proven to be quite controversial because of its great semantic and morphosyntactic complexity: some say the continuum is in the order third-second-first (as in the binary analysis discussed above), others that it is third-first-second (Croft 1990: 93), given the greater frequency of first person over second in dialogue and the fact that first person is dominant in agreement (if the subject is both first and second or first and third, then first plural is used). Still others claim that it should be correlated with the animacy/agency hierarchy found in morphosyntax, defined as first/second person pronoun — third person pronoun — proper name — human common noun — non-human animate noun — inanimate noun, in descending order (Croft 1990: 111–117). This hierarchy (one of several, sometimes called functional syntactic markedness hierarchies) is used to explain various morphosyntactic facts. For example, first and second person pronouns and third person animate pronouns and animate nouns are more likely to occur as subjects of transitive verbs than inanimates. In addition, objects high in animacy have non-zero case markers or differentiate subject from object case while objects lower in animacy do not (e.g., in Latin neuters, -um is used for nominative and accusative but masculines and feminines have -us and -a for nominative and -um and -am for accusative).
In similar fashion, markedness and hierarchy patterns do not occur in isolation, but rather tend to be found in clusters, which then define unmarked, sometimes called prototypical, combinations. For example, the unmarked (prototypical) subject has been defined in terms of a bundle of categories, e.g., it is animate, topical, agentive, singular, definite (thus, in English, a sentence of the general pattern John hit some balls is more common than A ball was in the corner), whereas marked subjects may differ in various ways from this prototypical combination. In fact, the notion of prototype is based on some of the same insights as the notion of markedness, since with prototypicality there is a recognition of asymmetry among exemplars of a given category: like unmarked categories, prototypes are more basic, combine more freely and productively than do non-prototypes, are more frequent and more familiar, are more salient, have more autonomy, etc. That is, prototypes resemble unmarked terms in many respects. However, they are not strictly the same; for example, the unmarked singular in its prototypical (basic) usage refers to one exemplar, but in its non-prototypical usage it can be generic (e.g., one man vs. modern man or mankind). Hierarchies and prototypes are especially used in those areas which have fewer obvious binary relations, are less tightly organized than are either morphology or phonology (syntax, lexicon, discourse, pragmatics), and in which the application of markedness is most controversial (see Croft 1990: 95–154).

5.3. Invariance, markedness and markedness reversals

In the decades since markedness was first formulated, the original insight that marked and unmarked values are imposed on properties has been combined with other closely allied phenomena by some linguists. For example, the plus (+) value of a feature has been assumed to be marked by definition and the minus (-) value unmarked, where plus means presence and minus means absence of the feature (this is probably linked to the original, phonological definition of markedness as the presence of an extra, complex property such as voicing, nasality). In other cases, features are treated as just formal diacritics, in which the plus and minus values are symmetrical and thus in principle interchangeable, e.g., present tense is characterized as [+present] and past is [-present], just as man as [+male] and woman as [-male].

Other linguists claim, however, that mark and feature must be differentiated and in particular that the minus value of a feature may be marked, that marks can vary according to the simultaneous and/or sequential context (markedness is context-sensitive, not context-free), and that the presence of an entity is not the same as markedness (see Battistella 1990; 1996). Considerations such as these have led to some revisions in how markedness has been applied in morphology as well as in phonology, syntax, and so forth. One basic change has been to differentiate between mark and property/feature: a given feature (e.g., [-plural], [+feminine]) may be either marked or unmarked. If the markedness value is different in different contexts, there is a case of markedness reversal/shift, also called global vs. local markedness when the reversal seems to occur in only some minor or special environments. For example, in Frisian, singular is unmarked and plural marked for many nouns, but for a small class of nouns (e.g., body parts which come in pairs, domestic animals which usually occur in herds), plural is unmarked and thus has served as the basis for analogical reformation (Tiersma 1982). In addition, to use a cross-linguistic example, nominative was the unmarked case in Classical Latin (it is the dictionary form). However, in Old French, nominative was marked, being used only for subjects, whereas oblique was unmarked (but see Mayerthaler 1988: 50–65); thus, for example, the modern French nominal forms come from the old obliques, not the nominatives. In the case of the animacy hierarchy, the subject of a transitive verb is less marked the higher in animacy it is, while the object is more marked the higher in animacy it is. Markedness reversals are also prevalent in the lexicon. There are many examples showing that the unmarked sex reference in English is male (host is used for both generic usage and to refer to the male; hostess is used only for females). In contrast, sometimes the term of the opposition which is used for the female is also used for generic usage, e.g., generic and female cow vs. bull, used for the male only.

Such claims of reversals have proven to be controversial. For some linguists, markedness values are invariant and by definition
they cannot differ. Some associate markedness with naturalness or normality: marked values are assumed to be unnatural and thus more difficult to produce, comprehend, and acquire, more prone to instability and change, and less common intralinguistically (see Mayerthaler 1981; Warzel 1984; and Art. 31). For some others, markedness values can differ across languages and through time, but are invariant in a given language at a given time. In such cases, the plus value of a feature is always marked and its opposite is not a minus value but a zero value (van Schooneveld 1978; Andrews 1990). This means that markedness is equated with both feature and invariance: woman is invariably female, which is its feature and its mark; in such cases, no difference is made between being unmarked and syncretism or deflection (e.g., both he and they are unmarked for [–female]).

Others have insisted that mark, feature and invariance are three different, interrelated concepts (Jakobson 1974; Newfield & Waugh 1991). Early work had assumed, for example, that there was a universal markedness relation within certain grammatical categories (see 4). However, more recent work has shown that the separation of mark and feature allows for either pole of an opposition to be marked, both across languages and within a language, thus allowing for markedness reversals. For example, across languages, masculine is the unmarked gender of nouns in familiar European languages, but feminine is the unmarked gender in some Iroquoian languages. Within a language, singular is the unmarked number in nouns in English, but plural is the unmarked number in the pronominal opposition we – I, since the unmarked we can refer not only to more than one person but also to one person alone (the royal or editorial we), whereas the singular I can only refer to one person. The same is true for many, or perhaps all, inflectional categories.

5.4. Other uses of the term markedness

Because markedness is correlated with issues of frequency, regularity, normality, and so forth, marked has also come to mean strange, deviant, unusual, unexpected in a given context, that is, stylistically marked, e.g., the use of the present to refer to the past as in the historical present (Eng. and just as I was about to cross the street, John comes up to me and says...). is a stylistically marked usage of the unmarked term. The use of an unmarked category may also be pragmatically marked. For example, in French, the pronoun vous is unmarked vs. tu (both mean ‘you’) because tu means that the speaker is in a close relation of solidarity with the addressee, whereas vous is used in all other cases. The use of vous is pragmatically unmarked when addressed to a stranger but unexpected (pragmatically marked — it may be ironic or pejorative or teasing) when used with a friend. In like fashion, categories may be sociolinguistically/socioculturally marked (e.g., English non-standard throwed is marked vs. standard threw).

6. Range of application of markedness

These last examples take us far from the original insight with which we started. Indeed some linguists believe that markedness is a hallmark of human language precisely because it is a very simple idea which explains seemingly disparate facts in a variety of domains. They see simplicity and generality on the one hand, and objective and empirical specificity on the other. However, there are other linguists who feel that the original definition of markedness has been stretched so far as to be an unwieldy cover term for very different phenomena, especially since the definition and the criteria for markedness tend to change across theoretical traditions and the various domains of language.

Indeed, this last point alludes to another area of controversy: namely, the range of application of markedness. Some restrict its application to just morphology or phonology, or see its validity within individual languages but doubt its universal applicability, while for others it can be applied both within a language and across languages (see Battistella 1990; 1996). For some linguists it is a low-level theory needing explanation, whereas for others it is one of the major conceptual and explanatory achievements of contemporary linguistics. Finally, while some see it as strictly linguistic, others argue that it is a biological phenomenon; still others correlate it with the cognitive and perceptual domains of prototypicality and the figure vs. ground distinction, or point out the correlation between complexity of thought and simplicity of expression, or claim that is reasonable to expect the more widely-used human artifacts to be simpler in structure and to have more sub-
types in order to suit the wider range of uses to which they are put (Moravcsik & Wirth 1986). Still others point to its application to human culture more generally and to virtually all other symbolic/semiotic systems. For example, Jakobson & Pomorska (1980) point out that the custom of wearing clothes is unmarked for 20th century man, but is a marked state for Neolithic man. Indeed, for scholars like Jakobson, markedness is explanatory not just for language, but also for human behavior and thought in general. They claim that it is a characteristically human trait to conceive of phenomena as binary and asymmetrical, i.e., marked and unmarked.

7. References
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30. Iconicity

1. Introduction

The fundamental principle of semiotics is that signs are symbolic (arbitrary or unmotivated) in most mature grammatical systems (see Art. 23). This has been a mainstay of grammatical theory for well over two thousand years, and consequently a heuristic in many branches of the field of language study, notably comparative and historical linguistics. For example, the fact that there is nothing houndlike about the word hound is the reason that resemblances like Germ. Hund, Eng. hound are taken as a sign of the common origin of these words (Anttila 1972).

Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction to be made between the inventory of actually occurring more or less arbitrary morphemes


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