

On Morphological Linearization: Evidence from Baure

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Based on verbal and nominal agreement in the Arawak language Baure, I argue that the linear position of an affix (i.e. its status as pre- or suffix) may be in principle independent of its phonological content. A pervasive property of the Baure agreement paradigm is that all exponents may appear in either prefix or suffix position, depending on the grammatical function they encode. To give an example, *ro*, encoding 3SG.MASC agreement, shows up before the verbal stem if it realizes agreement with a verbal subject or possessor agreement, and follows the stem in the case of object agreement or agreement with a non-verbal predicate. This distribution is exceptionless and instantiates a striking pattern of partial syncretism: The exponents for any given combination of ϕ -features are syncretic only for their phonological content, not their linear position.

These data are theoretically important in that they call for a framework that allows to sever phonological content from linear position. I will argue that this can only be accomplished if there is some notion of hierarchical morphological structure. All theories rejecting such a notion (such as A-Morphous Morphology, Paradigm Function Morphology, Network Morphology) specify linear position and phonological content by one and the same mechanism (word-formation rules, rules of exponence) and thus fail to account for the partial syncretism. I conclude that theories involving hierarchical morphological structure—e.g., Distributed Morphology—are supported by the Baure data.