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Productivity

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1 Introduction

The notion of productivity is in principle applicable both to word-formation and to inflection, but in this chapter we focus exclusively on word-formation.

Since Schultink's seminal work of 1961, morphological productivity has been understood as the possibility, for language users, to coin unintentionally an, in principle, uncountable number of new morphologically complex words.

Productivity has been a focus of increasing discussion in morphological analyses (see Plag 1999 and Bauer 2001, both titled *Morphological Productivity*); most handbooks in the field of morphology have dedicated an entire chapter to this concept (among others: Aronoff and Anshen 1998; Koefoed and van Marle 2000; Rainer 2000; Bauer 2005; Baayen 2009; Aronoff and Lindsay 2014; Gaeta and Ricca 2015), not to mention partial chapters devoted to this concept in other textbooks.

The reason for this popularity is that morphology actually *is* productivity (and the question arises as to whether productivity, in turn, *is* morphology). Indeed, according to Aronoff and Anshen (1998), “morphology deals only with potential words.” And, even more, “morphological theory should account only for processes of word formation which are productive” (Baayen and Lieber 1991: 801–2). Determining which processes are productive and which are not is thus a key issue in morphological research. Baayen addressed this issue in such a way as to supersede intuitive judgments on productivity, and achieved significant results (Baayen 1992) that have subsequently given rise to a significant amount of statistically based research (e.g., Baayen and Renouf 1996; Baayen and Neijt 1997).

Both qualitative (as in Schultink 1961) and quantitative (as in Baayen 1992) definitions of productivity have been widely commented upon and disputed.