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Unifying syntax and irregular morphology: French verbs

Abstracts: Conventional wisdom has it that grammar contains a "pretty" component, syntax, where everything is regular and predictable, and an "ugly" component, morphology and/or the lexicon, where chaos and irregularity reign. For instance the fact that French finite verbs are moved above a series of adverbs is regular and predictable, but the fact that *savoir* has up to five different roots (sav-, sai-, s(u), sau-, sach-) is unpredictable chaos. Because of that, it is agreed that we need a component of grammar which has technology to deal with ad-hoc rules, lists of exceptions, rewriting or adjusting features, etc. In this presentation, I will argue that the conventional wisdom is wrong: the chaos is only superficial, and the normal, regular rules of grammar can handle all the allomorphies, suppletions, portemanteaus and other seemingly arbitrary facts of morphosyntax. To illustrate this, I will discuss the rich patterns of French finite verbs, regular and irregular, going through the morphemes one by one and giving precise lexical entries for each of them – until the French pattern entirely follows from simple, universal principles of syntax.