

INFLECTIONAL DEFECTIVENESS

Paradigmatic gaps (“missing” inflected forms) have traditionally been considered to be the random detritus of a language’s history and marginal exceptions to the normal functioning of its inflectional system. Arguing that this is a misperception, *Inflectional Defectiveness* demonstrates that paradigmatic gaps are in fact normal and expected products of inflectional structure. Sims offers an accessible exploration of how and why inflectional defectiveness arises, why it persists, and how it is learned. The book presents a theory of morphology which is rooted in the implicative structure of the paradigm. This systematic exploration of the topic also addresses questions of inflection class organization, the morphology–syntax interface, the structure of the lexicon, and the nature of productivity. Presenting a novel synthesis of established research and new empirical data, this work is significant for researchers and graduate students in all fields of linguistics.

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ANDREA D. SIMS

The Ohio State University



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**For my parents
and for Jason**

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Preface

I first began working on inflectional defectiveness for my dissertation (Sims 2006), and this book is the inheritor of that thesis. The argument that I put forward in the following pages – that inflectional defectiveness is a systemic variant of normal inflectional structure that is rooted in the structure of the inflectional paradigm and the dynamic organization of the lexicon – already appeared in the dissertation, albeit in preliminary form, and so the core idea of the earlier work (its “soul,” if you will) carries forward into this work. At the same time, the project has taken a long path and very little of the actual material from the dissertation (its “corporeal body”) has survived the journey. My thinking about defectiveness, and about morphological theory in general, has developed and evolved considerably in the intervening time. Relevant new work has appeared and continues to appear, influencing my thinking and challenging me to rethink and push further. Finally, the present book has a broader scope than the dissertation, supporting a more expansive argument. As a consequence, readers who are familiar with the dissertation will find that this book bears little similarity to it.

Still, inflectional defectiveness remains interesting to me for the same reasons that I was drawn to the topic originally. Inflectional defectiveness is a situation in which we find *no* word-form, where by all accounts we expect to find *some* word-form. Given that the phenomenon seems to contradict the fundamental nature of inflectional morphology and fly in the face of speakers’ tendency to generalize, we might expect it to be all but impossible for paradigmatic gaps to arise, and when they do surface, we might expect them to be quickly smoothed out. Yet contrary to expectations, paradigmatic gaps do arise occasionally, and once they do, they can persist indefinitely. Why does this happen? And how?

Paradigmatic gaps (=instances of inflectional defectiveness) are often considered to be the flotsam and jetsam of language – superficial historical trash that washes up on the shores of inflectional systems. They seem at first to be merely the ragged edge of an otherwise smoothly functioning inflectional

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system. Yet there are also data that tempt the linguist toward a deeper perspective. Why do gaps often follow the distribution of a morphophonological alternation? Or the distribution of a stem alternant? Why does defectiveness sometimes follow the distribution of a pattern of syncretism (or sometimes override a pattern of syncretism, or get overridden by a pattern of syncretism)? Over the last decade and more, evidence has accrued that defectiveness is not merely historical residue but rather is integrated with the core functioning of inflection.

Echoing a broader trend of investigating inflectional structure via phenomena that lie at its periphery, in this book I investigate why paradigmatic gaps arise in inflectional systems, why they persist, and how they are learned by new generations of speakers. Ultimately, I argue that far from being flotsam and jetsam, inflectional defectiveness offers deep insights into inflectional structure. I hope that the reader finds the material to be as rich and enticing as I have.

There are many people to thank, starting with my dissertation committee: Brian Joseph, Mary Beckman, and Dan Collins. Their guidance on the dissertation was invaluable, and despite the continued development of the project long after they had any official responsibility for it, I continue in this book to perceive their positive influence. Additionally, during a postdoctoral fellowship at Northwestern University I benefited from a productive and inspiring collaboration with Janet Pierrehumbert and Robert Daland. That collaboration produced the learning model that forms the core of Chapter 7, and I thank them greatly for their tangible contributions to that part of the study and also for the less quantifiable ways in which they were formative on my thinking. Similarly, Matt Goldrick deserves recognition for giving me a nudge in the right direction at the right time.

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- Linguistics speaker series, University of Chicago, 2007.
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Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ABES	abessive
ACC	accusative
ACC2	second accusative
ALL	allative
ANIM	animate / animacy
AUX	auxiliary
CF	count form
COM	comitative
DAT	dative
DEF	definite
DESD	desiderative
DIR OBJ	direct object
DU	dual
F	feminine
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
GEN2	second genitive
H	entropy
HNC	Hellenic National Corpus
I	mutual information
ILL	illative
IMP	imperative
INAN	inanimate
IND	indicative
INDF	indefinite
INDR OBJ	indirect object
INF	infinitive
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INS	instrumental
LKN	<i>Lexikó tīs koinís neoellīnikís</i>
LNEG	<i>Lexikó tīs néas ellīnikís glóssas</i>
LOC	locative
LOC2	second locative
M	masculine
N	neuter
NEG	negation
NOM	nominative
NPST	non-past
NUM	number
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PART	partitive
PASS	passive
PF	paradigm function
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PPP	past passive participle
PRS	present
PST	past
PURP	purposive
RECP	reciprocal
RNC	Russian National Corpus
SBJ	subject
SG	singular
VOC	vocative
β	beta parameter (strength of analogy)
σ	set of morphological-paradigm feature values
τ	set of syntactic-paradigm feature values