Some concepts and consequences of uninflectedness

Andrew Spencer
University of Essex
spena@essex.ac.uk

Uninflectability raises three sets of questions:

(1)   What counts as 'inflection'?

(2)   Relationship to paradigm organization (esp. defectivity, syncretism)?

(3)   Relationship to
(3a) lexical insertion; (3b) uninflecting lexemes; (3c) constructional uninflectability.

(1)   Do uninflectable lexemes resist
(i) derivational morphology? No: *kino* ⇒ *kinoficirovat'* 'to supply with cinemas', *kinošnik/ica* 'cinema worker (M/F)'
(ii) transpositions, e.g. denominal relational adjectives? Perhaps not: *kinošnyj* 'pertaining to the cinema', *pal'tovyj* 'pertaining to overcoats', German *Rosaheit* 'pinkness'
(iii) evaluative morphology? Not necessarily: *pal'tiško* '(cheap) overcoat (pej.)', *kinoška* '(squalid) cinema (pej.)'. [Paucity of uninflectable verbs makes it hard to investigate inflection-like clitics, a-structure alternations, periphrases; but note, indeclinable adjectives generally allow analytic comparatives/superlatives.]

(2) Is uninflectability really just mass syncretism? Is there any way to describe (lexical, constructional) uninflectability without an explicit appeal to the paradigm concept (i.e. is uninflectability a fatal challenge to models like DM)?

(3) Spencer's (2020) Default Exponence Principle for uninflectable lexemes is flawed. I therefore propose a model of lexical insertion based on a coindexing mechanism defined over pairings of cells in a lexeme's form/realized paradigm and syntactic terminals, which can be circumvented by parochial stipulation for defective lexemes. For an uninflecting lexeme (e.g. an English preposition) we define a virtual form/realized paradigm occupied by the lexeme's (sole, unique) root but without any feature specification. An uninflectable lexeme has a full content paradigm but no (true) form/realized paradigm, as in Spencer (2020), so in order to undergo lexical insertion it is mapped to a virtual form/realized paradigm, as though it were a truly uninflecting lexeme. In (full) constructional uninflectability the syntax lacks expected morphosyntactic feature specifications so no pairing with the actual form/realized paradigm cells is possible, and so again the lexeme has to be treated as though it were uninflecting.

References: • Spencer, A. (2020). Uninflectedness: Uninflecting, uninflectable and uninflected words, or the complexity of the simplex. In L. Körtvélyessy & P. Štekauer (eds.), *Complex words: Advances in morphology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 142–158.