

Allomorphy – Consequences and Case Studies

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The term “allomorphy” is used when the same piece of linguistic information exhibits more than one phonetic realization. Except that it isn’t, really. In some cases the difference between the two realizations is judged as too “phonetic-y” to be allomorphy, while in others the difference is deemed too great. The correct definition of allomorphy therefore carries implication for the entire theory of Grammar. How phonetic is our knowledge of the language we speak? How abstract can a learner get when lexicalizing a single base for two surface realizations? And how close should two realizations be to be considered allomorphs: should Spanish [ped-ir, pid-o] be analyzed like [ir, boj]? Once two allomorphs are established, can phonology influence the choice between them – that is, can the input to phonology be more than one allomorph? And what if phonology does not “express” a preference? In this course, we will examine these issues in principle and through several case studies.