

This talk proposes a means for capturing the unique behavior of English nominal compounds (Jespersen 1909) within the framework of Distributed Morphology (DM, Halle and Marantz 1993, 1994). In nominal compounds, regular inflection is not allowed in the non-head (left) member of nominal compounds (1b), while derivational (1d) and irregular inflectional morphology (1c) are.

This pattern is problematic for DM for a number of reasons. First, “the pervasive syntax perspective” (Haugen 2004) of DM mandates that a difference in grammaticality between two morphological forms must be attributable to their morphosyntactic structures. According to the model of DM proposed by Halle and Marantz (1993, 1994), the structure of *\*rats-infested* (2a) and *lice-infested* (2b) are identical: the only difference being the application of a readjustment rule which changes *louse* into *lice*. Further, DM does not recognize a difference between inflectional and derivational morphology; they are both syntactic terminal nodes. Thus, the ungrammaticality of *\*rats-infested* versus the grammaticality of *participation grade* cannot be attributed to a separation of derivational versus inflectional morphology (see Kiparsky 1984, 2003).

Siddiqi (2006) proposes that stem allomorphy results from the fusion of the root and the functional morphology driven by the economy constraint Minimize Exponence,<sup>1</sup> rather than resulting from the application of a readjustment rule. According to Siddiqi (2006), pluria tantum or group plural forms such as *numbers* “gambling” and irregular forms such as *lice* are each one Vocabulary Item (VI) realizing only one terminal node (4), contra the DM tradition in which *lice* is two VIs (*lice* and  $\emptyset$ ) (see Halle and Marantz 1993, 1994). Thus the structures of *lice-infested* and *\*rats-infested* are not the same (3). Since the two compounds are different structures, they can have different analyses within DM.

Compounding is an application of morphological merger to a pair of nodes  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , where  $\alpha$  is a phrase ( $X^n$ ,  $n > 0$ ) and  $\beta$  is a root, dominated by the phrase projected by the root (or  $\sqrt{P}$ ). I argue that nominal compounds are an application of morphological merger in English that adjoins a noun ( $n^n$ ,  $n > 0$ ) to a root under a projection of that root. More specifically, nominal compounds are the joining of the feature [n] (the formal feature contained by the nominalizing head) to a root. Since the feature [n] is embedded in the case of a regularly inflected form, but as a result of fusion is not embedded in irregular forms, morphological merger can target an irregularly inflected form (3a&b) but not a regular (3c). That is, regular inflectional morphology, since it is projected between the noun and the head of the compound, interferes with compounding, but does not intervene in the case of irregular morphology, since it has fused with the head. Regular derivational morphology is permitted because the dominant node of the non-head member is always a nominalizing morpheme (such as *-ing*, *-tion*, *-ity*, etc.) which contains the feature [n]. Thus, irregularly inflected nominals, derived nominals, and pluria tantum are all allowed in English nominal compounds because the [n] is not embedded in their structure. However, regularly inflected nominals are disallowed due to the embedding of the feature [n] below the Num. This type of analysis of familiar data from a fresh perspective is crucial to the field.

<sup>1</sup> Minimize Exponence: the most economical derivation is the one that maximally realizes the derivation’s features using the minimum number of morphemes (Siddiqi 2006).

**(1a) sing.**

*dog-lover*  
*rat-chaser*  
*log-cutter*  
*hand-made*  
*finger-bowl*  
*coat-rack*

**(b) Unmarked pl.**

*\*dogs-lover*  
*\*rats-chaser*  
*\*logs-cutter*  
*\*hands-made*  
*\*fingers-bowl*  
*\*coats-rack*

**(c) marked pl.**

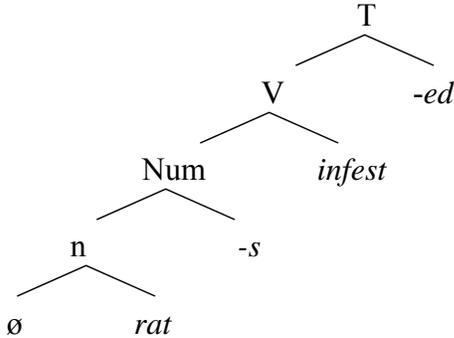
*feet-first*  
*lice-infested*  
*teeth-marks*  
*alumni club*  
*dice pool*  
*people eater*

**(d) pluria tantum/group pls.**

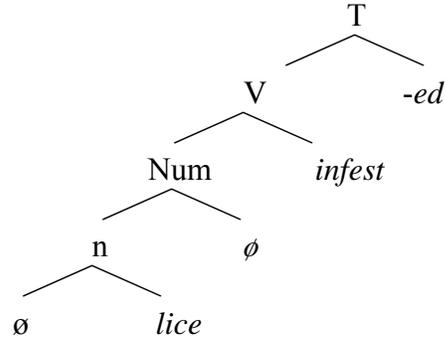
*systems analyst*  
*parks department*  
*admissions committee*  
*numbers racket*  
*pants-pocket*  
*alms-giver*

**(2) Compounds in DM**

(a) *\*Rats-infested*

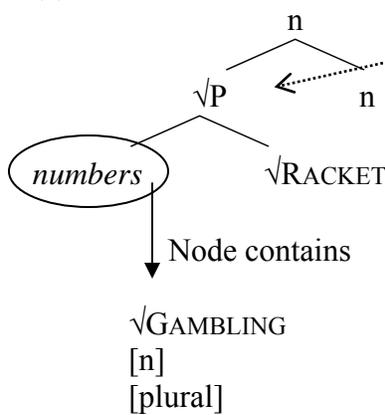


(b) *Lice-infested*

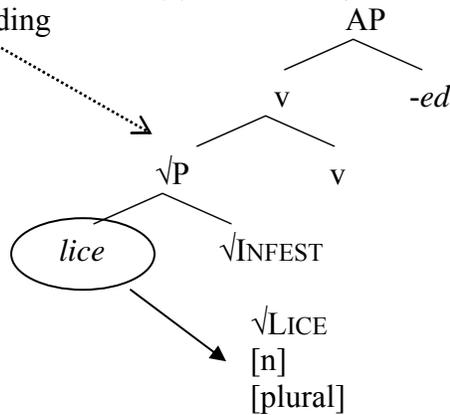


**(3) Compounding with Minimize Exponence**

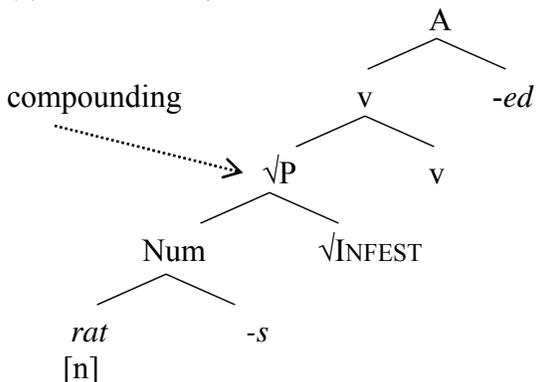
(a) *Numbers racket*



(b) *Lice-infested*



(c) *\*Rats-infested*



**(4) Vocabulary Entry for numbers**

√GAMBLING → *numbers*  
 [n] /nʌmbɪz/  
 [plural]