

ORGANIZED NONSENSE: ON SELF-REPLICATING PATTERNS IN DIACHRONIC MORPHOLOGY

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All Romance languages acquired three major patterns of allomorphy in the root-formative of verbs. Two were the result of regular sound change, one was originally aligned with marking of perfective aspect. These extramorphological determinants quickly fell away, but the resulting patterns survived. Synchronically, their distribution is 'nonsensical', but recurrent - combining idiosyncratically heterogeneous sets of paradigm-cells. They are 'autonomously morphological' or 'morphomic' in the sense of Aronoff (*Morphology By Itself* 1994). At issue is not just the residue of older 'états de langue', but diachronically 'indestructible', self-replicating patterns. I briefly illustrate their history, and ask a curiously neglected question: why do they persist if they do not 'make sense'? My (admittedly speculative) answer is paradoxical: such phenomena are driven by the same fundamental principle that underlies what is sometimes called 'Humboldt's Universal': 'one meaning — one form'. Morphomic patterns serve to maximize the predictability of the relationship between the lexeme (as signatum) and its signans (the set of forms that represent it). Their erratic distribution is unimportant, as long as it is consistent and predictable.