

The Semantic Basis of the Internal Vowel Alternation System in English

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The Internal Vowel Alternation (IVA) system – is commonly referred to as arbitrarily appearing in a small number of the so-called irregular Noun Plurals (e.g. *goose-geese, mouse-mice, foot-feet*) and Past Tense verb forms (e.g. *sing-sang, take-took, swing-swung*) in Modern English. But, historically, the IVA was a prevalent and productive process in Old English in both the nominal and the verbal systems. Following a sign-oriented analysis of a language as a: "system of systems composed of various sub-systems (revolving around the notion of the linguistic sign) which are organized internally and systematically related to each other and used by human beings to communicate"(Tobin 1990:47), we will postulate that the IVA is a signal (*signifiant*) that is connected to a meaning- (*signifié*) in the Saussurean sense. Indeed, we have already demonstrated that the IVA nominal and verbal forms are systematic phonologically, i.e. they are non-arbitrary (Even-Simkin and Tobin 2009). Beedham (2005:114) argues that "[a]ll linguistic forms must fit into the system somehow, and they all must have a meaning, it is simply a case of working out how they fit in and what the meaning is". In this further analysis of the IVA forms, we found that the English IVA systems are also both motivated and systematic semantically -- so that differences in form imply differences in meaning. We maintain that each IVA pattern reflects a fundamental common semantic denominator. Thus, our study connects the form-phonology and the meaning-semantics of the phenomenon of the IVA as a full-fledged system of linguistic signs in English.

References:

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