Marianne Mithun

We know that the size and content of words varies widely across languages; what can be said in a single word in some languages can be expressed only in a multi-word sentence in others. The word payugqetullrullinikiit, for example, used in a Central Alaskan Yup’ik (Eskimo) conversation, was translated into English as ‘they apparently used to bring food to her’. Some of the differences we find among languages in the content of words reflect differences in the ideas that are coded as basic concepts. The Yup’ik word above is based on the verb root payug- ‘to take food over to a friend, relative, or neighbor’. The root does not contain segments meaning ‘food’ or ‘relative’; it simply denotes a recognizable activity that constitutes a unitary cultural concept for speakers. Other cross-linguistic differences in the amount of information packaged in words are the result of differences in word structure. In polysynthetic languages like Yup’ik, words may have elaborate structures. The word above consists of seven meaningful parts: payug-qe-tu-lru-liini-k-ii. Following the root are a suffix -qe- ‘time after time’, a suffix -tu- ‘customarily’, a suffix -lru- for past tense, a suffix -liini- ‘apparently’, a suffix -k- for participial mood, and finally a pronominal suffix -ii ‘they/her’. The variation we find in the amount of information carried by words cross-linguistically raises some fundamental questions. First, are utterances like payugqetullrullinikiit really single words? Second, if they are, do such differences in the packaging of information matter?
1. The identification of words

The most obvious criterion for identifying words in a language is the judgment of speakers. Speakers usually find it easy to repeat a sentence one word at a time, even if they have never given much thought to the structure of their language or seen it written. They provide consistent answers, and different speakers concur in their judgments. In natural conversation speakers do not normally pause within words to search for the next morpheme (converse ... ation), the way they may pause within sentences to search for the next word (to search for ... the next word). If for some reason they are interrupted mid-word, they return to the beginning and start again, uttering the full word as a unit.

A number of other features characterize words as well, some of them constant across languages, some of them language-specific. Some are phonological, that is, matters of pronunciation. In many languages a word contains just one primary stress, one syllable that is pronounced with a different pitch, greater volume, and/or greater length than the others. In some languages the location of stress depends on word boundaries. In Mohawk, an Iroquoian language of northeastern North America, the primary stress falls basically on the next-to-the-last (penultimate) syllable: eniethia'tetshahnïhten ‘we will intimidate them’. In Yup’ik, stress placement is more complex, but it depends on syllable count from the beginning of the word. Stress can thus provide additional evidence of word boundaries.

In many languages certain phonological adjustments, termed *internal sandhi*, occur within words but not between words. The first suffix in the Yup’ik verb payuggetullrullinikiit cited above, for example, actually has the basic form -rqe-, but sequences of more than two consonants are not permitted in Yup’ik. The combination payug-rqe- is accordingly pronounced payugge-, with omission of the r. (In the practical Yup’ik orthography used here, the digraph ll, seen here in the suffixes for past tense and ‘apparently’, represents a single consonant, a voiceless lateral fricative.) The basic form of the Yup’ik participial suffix is -ke-, but since Yup’ik does not permit sequences of more than two vowels, it is pronounced -k- before the suffix -iit. We do not find the same kinds of phonological adjustments across word boundaries: a Yup’ik word ending in two vowels may be followed by a word beginning in two vowels.

Other distinguishing features of words are morphological, matters of internal structure. The relative order of morphemes within words is more rigid than the order...
of words in phrases and sentences. If any two morphemes in a Mohawk word are reversed, the result is no word at all. A sequence like iethi-en-ia’t-etshahni-ht-en, formed by reversing the order of the first two prefixes of the word ‘we will intimate them’ above, would be unrecognizable to Mohawk speakers, even though it is phonologically well formed. Shifting the order of words within sentences, on the other hand, may affect style or even idiomaticity, but it does not usually destroy the sentence in quite the same way, since the elements are still recognizable. In some languages alternative orders among morphemes do occur. Such a situation can be seen in Yup’ik. The noun yugpacuaq ‘little giant’ was formed by first combining the root yug- ‘person’ with the suffix -pag ‘big’ to form a new word yugpak ‘person-big’ or ‘giant’. The new noun was then combined with the suffix -cuar- ‘little’ to yield the word yugpag-cuaq ‘giant-little’. The noun yucuarpak ‘big midget’ was formed by first combining the root yug- ‘person’ with the suffix -cuar ‘small’ to derive the noun yucuaq ‘person-small’ or ‘midget’. The resulting noun was then combined with the suffix -pag ‘big’ to yield yucuar-pak ‘midget-big’.

Words typically differ from phrases and sentences in that other words cannot normally be inserted inside of them. In English we can say He loves [loud] arguments and He is argumentative but not He is argument[ loud]ative. Similarly in Yup’ik and Mohawk, no word that could be uttered in isolation can be inserted inside of another word.

In many languages words can be identified by their morphological structures. In Yup’ik all inflected words (nouns, verbs, and demonstratives) must begin with one and only one root, like payag- in the verb above, and end with one inflectional suffix complex, like -k-iit. It is thus easy to identify most Yup’ik words from their internal structures: they begin before the root and end after the inflectional suffix. Morphological structure in Mohawk is somewhat more complex, but it is equally well defined and unambiguous.

Words are sometimes defined as ‘minimal free forms’: they may be manipulated syntactically, but their parts may not. Morphemes are resistant not only to reordering but also to omission under identity. In many languages certain otherwise obligatory words or phrases may be omitted from sentences when they are recoverable from previous context. In English we can say We would go to the hotel and (we) (would) stay two nights, without repeating the subject pronoun we or the modal would in the second clause. In Yup’ik the mood and pronominal markers must appear in every verb, because they are dependent morphemes.
(1) Yup’ik tense and mood: Elena Charles, speaker

Yup’ik: Tua-i-llu hotelamun agrutta
there=that-too hotel-ALLATIVE go.overland-MOOD-1.PL
‘And then we went to the hotel

malrugnek qavarfota.
and stayed two nights.’

Similar patterns can be seen in Mohawk, where every verb must contain a pronominal prefix specifying the core arguments of the clause and an aspect suffix.

Speakers are usually conscious of the meanings of words as wholes, but not necessarily of their meaningful parts. They may manipulate morphemes adeptly to form new words, but their knowledge of the internal structure of words is largely unconscious. Discussing the Yup’ik word ayagyugyaaqellruunga ‘I would have wanted to go’, a speaker commented that he knew the verb was past tense, but he had no idea which part of the word corresponded to the tense marker. (The word consists of morphemes ayag-yug-yaage-llru-u-nga go-want-in.vain-past-intransitive.indicative-1sg.) Similarly, speakers of Mohawk know that the word eniethiia’tetshahníten ‘we will intimidate them’ contains specific reference to ‘we’ and ‘them’, but without training in linguistics they cannot identify the parts of the word that serve as pronouns. Conscious knowledge of the internal structure of words can of course be gained through systematic comparison of forms. Juxtaposition of the Mohawk eniethiia’tetshahníten ‘we will intimidate them’ with aithiia’tetshahníten ‘we would intimidate them’ suggests that the prefix en- of the first contributes the meaning ‘will’, and the prefix a- of the second contributes the meaning ‘would’. Through systematic comparisons of vocabulary we can ultimately identify all components of the word: en-iethi-ia’tetshahni-ht-en FUTURE-we/them-body-afraid-cause-PERFECTIVE.ASPECT, literally ‘we will cause them to be physically afraid’. Such comparison is a basic technique of linguistic analysis, but the activity is not one typically carried out consciously by speakers in the natural course of learning or using their mother tongue.

Words may also differ from phrases and sentences semantically. Words are formed for specific purposes, and they may shift in meaning over time as units. As a
result their meanings are not necessarily compositional, equal to the sum of their parts. The Yup’ik noun *nakacuguaq*, literally *nakacug-uaq* ‘bladder-imitation’ means ‘light bulb’; the noun *pugyaraq*, literally *puge-yaraq* ‘come.to.the.surface. emerging.halfway-device.for’ is the term for ‘neck opening of a pullover parka’. The noun *niucgnissuutet* ‘radio’ is plural, whether one is speaking about one radio or many; it is literally ‘devices for listening’, coined at a time when speakers were conscious of the multiple parts of such a machine (Jacobson 1984).

Words can differ from phrases and sentences in the way they are learned, stored in memory (the mental lexicon), and used by speakers. Speakers know not only which combinations of morphemes would constitute well-formed words in their language, they also know which combinations actually exist in their lexicon. Both Yup’ik and Mohawk have highly productive morphologies: speakers easily create new words as the need arises. But they are aware of the fact that they are creating vocabulary, a process that is different from the usual on-line production of sentences. A good Yup’ik speaker commented one day, “My mother, actually a lot of people, create a word to just fit the situation.” When asked whether he thought she recognized that it was new, he responded, “Oh yes. She will stop, say it a few times, until it is just right.” On another occasion he mentioned, “My mother said a word the other day to describe my dad, and it’s a word that I’d never heard before.” The word was *pamrigtu-nrutaq* ‘he.is.slow’ (*pamrig-tu-nrita-q* be.adroit-customarily-not-INTRANSITIVE.INDICATIVE-3.sg). The son was familiar with all of the parts of the word, and the word was completely regular in formation, but he still recognized it as a new combination, a new vocabulary item for him. Similar comments are made by speakers of Mohawk, who notice immediately when an elder or someone from another Mohawk community uses a word they have never heard, even when all components of the word are familiar and the formation is regular. Speakers do not notice novel sentences in the same way, provided that they follow general structural and collocational patterns. If I said *I saw an orange artichoke yesterday*, my listeners might realize that they had never seen an orange artichoke, but not that they had never heard that sentence before.

The phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical characteristics of words described here are well known and have been discussed widely in the linguistic literature. They all point to the special status of the word as a tightly integrated cognitive and communicative unit. In most cases the features coincide to make the identification of words in any language a simple matter. In a few
cases, however, they do not, as pointed out by Aronoff (1976), Scalise (1984), Zwicky (1984), Di Sciullo & Williams (1987), Spencer (1991), Anderson (1992), and others. For this reason units are sometimes identified specifically as phonological words, morphological words, syntactic words, or lexical items/lexemes.

One set of problematic constructions involve clitics, such as the English future =ll of I'll come right over or the Yup’ik =llu ‘and’ of tua=i=llu ‘and then’ in (1) above. On phonological grounds clitics seem like parts of words: they cannot be pronounced in isolation, they do not carry stress of their own, and they may participate in internal sandhi processes. In Turkish, for example, vowel harmony extends over full words including clitics. On syntactic grounds, however, clitics display characteristics of words: they can appear in a variety of orders within the sentence (I’ll do it; The man I met’ll do it) and they can be omitted under identity: I’ll finish the dishes and (x) sweep the floor). Speakers’ behaviors often reflect the indeterminacy of clitics: it is here that they may hesitate when asked to pronounce sentences word-by-word. In some cases the intermediate status of clitics is a symptom of the fact that they are markers in transition, in the process of evolving from independent words (like English will) to dependent parts of words.

A second set of problematic constructions are compounds. In English we may wonder whether to write certain terms as two words or one: apple sauce or applesauce? In many languages compounds show the same patterns of stress placement as other words. Such patterns can be seen in Mohawk noun-verb compounds, also referred to as noun-incorporating constructions. The word niwahsón:tes ‘the night is so long’, for example, shows the same pattern of stress placement as other words: stress falls on the penultimate syllable, though it is part of an incorporated noun (ni-w-ahsónt’es so-neuter-night-be-long.stat). Compounds in many languages show the same internal sandhi processes as other words. Spencer (1991:42) notes that in Chukchi, a Luoravetlan language of Siberia, vowel harmony extends over compounds (including verbs with incorporated nouns) in the same way that it does over other words. In Finnish, however, processes of vowel harmony treat members of many compounds as separate words.

Even where phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic criteria coincide to delineate words, the status of these units as lexical items may vary. A Yup’ik speaker may know that the word pamrigtuq ‘he is adept’ is part of his vocabulary or mental lexicon, but he may not know which forms of the word he has actually heard: pamrigtuq ‘he is adept’, pamrigtut ‘they are adept’, pamrigtua ‘I am
adept’, *pamrigtuten* ‘you are adept’, or others. In the same way English speakers may know that they know the verb *skew* but not whether they have actually heard *skews* or *skewing*, forms which can be predicted to exist. A distinction is thus often made between *lexemes*, that is those elements known by speakers, and *word-forms*, alternate forms of lexemes. Lexemes are sometimes characterized as the words one might expect to find as separate entries in a dictionary; they typically correspond to stems without inflectional details, like *pamrig* - ‘be adept’ or *skew*. The distinction between knowing lexemes and knowing words is not always clearcut, however, as has been shown by Bybee 1985 and others. English speakers know not only the verb *go*, they also know the past tense *went*, a form not predictable by rule. When a Yup’ik speaker was asked how to say ‘eye’, he quickly supplied the dual form *iik* ‘two eyes’ but found he could not immediately come up with the singular form. His knowledge reflects use. Speakers mention two eyes more often than one. Furthermore in Yup’ik, as in many languages, nouns for body parts are not often used in isolation. They usually appear as part of a complex word, such as *iingi’rtuq* ‘he got something in his eye’ (*ii-ngir-tu-q eye-be.injured.in-transitive.indicative-3.singular*).

Lexemes do not always correspond to just one phonological or morphological word. As pointed out by Di Sciullo & Williams (1987) and others, such idiomatic English phrases as *take it out on*, *eat humble pie*, *pass the buck*, and *be in the red* consist of multiple words according to phonological and morphological criteria: their parts may be pronounced word-by-word and may be inflected. But speakers recognize these idioms as vocabulary items, with special meanings not equal to the sums of their parts.

Despite the occasional conflicts among criteria for wordhood, there is evidence from several quarters of the validity of the word as a cognitive unit. Some comes from observations of children’s acquisition of their mother tongue. In studies of European languages, one measure of progress in acquisition has traditionally been the MLU, the mean length of utterance measured in words. We might wonder whether children acquiring polysynthetic languages like Yup’ik and Mohawk follow similar patterns in their acquisition, or whether they acquire their languages morpheme-by-morpheme. The acquisition of polysynthetic languages is not as extensively documented as we would like, but certain patterns are clear.

Children begin their acquisition of Mohawk with the word as a fundamental unit, not the morpheme (Mithun 1989). Their first utterances consist of just the stressed syllable of the target word.
The strategy is purely phonological: children at this stage consistently choose the single, intonationally most salient syllable of the word, regardless of its function. Because of the morphological structure of Mohawk words, stress often falls somewhere on the stem, but the stressed syllable rarely actually matches the root. The stem ‘get in’ is -at-ita ‘self-be.in’, the stem ‘drink’ is -hnek-ihr- ‘liquid-consume’, and the term for ‘apple’ is a lexicalized construction se-w-ahi-owan-e ‘one-neuter-fruit-large-stative’.

Even as children become able to produce longer utterances, their speech is still phonologically based. Words consist of the stressed syllable plus the following syllable(s).

Even after multi-word sentences begin to appear there is little awareness of morphological structure. The sentence in (4) contains the emphatic negative tāhten and the first person form of the verb ‘want’ (adult tē:kehr = te-k-ehr- ‘NEGATIVE-1.sg-want-stative’). (The adult equivalent of this sentence would be Istā iāh tē:ienhre’.)

Acquisition continues to be phonologically based for a certain period as children produce longer words, adding pretonic syllables, some of which may contain
pronominal prefixes. It is only after a substantial repertoire of forms containing pronouns have been learned that morphological analysis begins and morphological patterns are acquired.

2. The difference a word makes

If the amount of information packaged in words varies so widely across languages, and if the various criteria for identifying words do not always coincide, the utility of the word as a linguistic unit might be questioned, particularly for cross-linguistic comparisons.

Languages that contain synthetic constructions like those reproduced below in (5) and (6) systematically contain analytic counterparts to these constructions as well, constructions in which the same ideas are expressed in a series of words.

(5) Yup’ik synthetic construction: Cyril Alexei, speaker

```
payugtetullullinikii
payugte-rqe-tu-llru-lnin-ke-iiit
```
take.food.to.relative-time.after.time-customarily-PAST-apparently-PARTICIPIAL-they/her ‘apparently they used to take food to her’

(6) Mohawk synthetic construction: Frank Natawe, speaker

```
eniethiia’tetshahnhthien
en-iethi-ia’t-tetshahni-hit-nen
```
FUTURE-we/them-body-fear-cause-PERFECTIVE ‘we will intimidate them’

Alongside of the suffix -rqe- ‘time after time’, Yup’ik also contains independent words with comparable meanings, such as erutuq ‘it recurs’ (erute-u-q recur-INTRANSITIVE.INDICATIVE-3.SG). Alongside of the suffix -tu- ‘customarily’ there are words like piurtut ‘they continue doing as they have been doing’ (piur-tu-t ‘keep.acting.as.one.does-INTRANSITIVE.INDICATIVE-3.PL). In addition to the past tense -llru- there are phrases such as ak’a tamaani ‘a long time ago’. In addition to pronominal suffixes like -iiit ‘they/her, they/him’ there are independent pronouns ellaita ‘they’ and ellii ‘her, him’. Similarly in Mohawk, alongside of the future prefix
- there are independent words such as *tá:we* ‘it is coming’ (*tá:we’ nenhnísera ... the day is coming when...*). Alongside of pronominal prefixes like *iethi* ‘we/them’ there are independent contrastive pronouns like *i* ‘we’ (which also means ‘I, me, us’). In addition to the incorporated noun root *ia’t-* there is an independent noun *oià:ta* ‘body’. In addition to the causative suffix *-ht* there are full verbs such as *iatiòn:ni* ‘we make/cause it’. It is well known that languages do not retain perfectly equivalent ways of expressing the same thing. An examination of the pragmatic contexts in which synthetic and analytic constructions are used shows that the packaging of information into words is indeed significant.

Words serve an important function as unitary names for unitary concepts. They are coined as labels for nameworthy ideas, like those in (7) and (8).

(7) Yup’ik words for nameworthy concepts: George Charles, speaker

a. *nunakuarcuun*

   *nuna-kuar-cuun*

   land-go.by.way.of-device for

   ‘automobile’

b. *tangercetaaliyartua*

   *tanger-cetaaq-liyar-tu-a*

   watch-device.used.to.cause-go.to.participate.in INTRANSITIVE.INDICATIVE-

   1.sg

   ‘I’m going to the movies.’

(8) Mohawk words for nameworthy concepts: Kanerahtenhá:wi Nicholas, speaker

a. *tsi*

   *ionterihwaienstâhkhwâ’*

   there

   ‘school’ (where one uses it to cause words to lie (down), to read)

b. *atì:tawi*

   *at-ia’t-awi*

   self-body-encircle

   ‘dress, coat, shirt’ (one encircles one’s body)

Speakers also exploit their options in packaging information to regulate the flow of information through discourse. Information that is worthy of an individual focus of attention is packaged in a separate word; information that is a secondary
element of a larger idea or an already established part of the scene may be expressed as a part of a word.

Languages in which the core arguments of clauses are regularly identified by pronominal affixes, like Yup’ik and Mohawk, always contain independent pronouns as well. An examination of their use in discourse shows how their functions contrast. While the pronominal affixes appear in the verb in every clause to identify the major participants in the event or state, the independent pronouns are used only for special emphasis, usually to point up a contrast. The sentence in (9) was uttered by Yup’ik speaker Elena Charles. People were going down to the river to fish through openings between ice floes. She herself felt that it could be dangerous to be out on the ice.

(9) Yup’ik contrastive pronoun: Elena Charles, speaker

```
Yuut agecaaqut unani;
yu-ut age-caaqe-u-t una-ni
person-pl go.over-in.vain-TRANSLATIVE.indicative-3pl toward.river-

'These trying to go down there,

However I myself do not want to.'
```

The fact that she was speaking about herself was already specified by the pronominal suffix -a ‘I’ on the verb; the independent pronoun wiinga emphasized a contrast with other people.

The sentence in (10) was said as Mrs. Charles described a hunting trip. She and her husband spotted some moose from their boat, but when Mr. Charles shot one of them, it jumped up and ran off. The motor on the boat failed to catch, so Mr. Charles told his wife to row as quickly as she could toward shore.

(10) Yup’ik contrastive pronoun: Elena Charles, speaker

```
Ellin-wa massinaq-wa
ellin=wa massinaq=wa
he.himself.ERGATIVE=while

'He, on the other hand
```

'He, on the other hand
The independent pronoun ellin emphasizes the contrast between the actions of husband and wife. The special emphasis conveyed by independent words like the contrastive pronoun can be heightened with extra heavy stress, an option not available with affixes.

A similar relationship between pronominal affixes and independent pronouns can be seen in Mohawk. All Mohawk verbs contain pronominal prefixes identifying the core arguments of the clause. The use of independent pronouns, which are rarer, can be seen in (11). Some men decided to play a joke on a friend who was a shoemaker, so they pretended that one of them had died and asked the shoemaker to watch over the body during the night. The shoemaker agreed and took along some work to pass the time. As he hammered away he whistled to himself. Suddenly he heard a voice from the casket.

(11) Mohawk independent pronouns: Kaia’titahkhe’ Jacobs, speaker

*He*! tha’tesat:tot!  
*he*  tha’-te-s-atotat  
hey  just-DUPICATIVE-2.SG-keep.quiet  
“Hey! You keep quiet!

[It is not proper to whistle while you are keeping watch.]  
The shoemaker replied:]

*l:se*  tha’tesat:tot  
*l:se’*  tha’-te-s-atotat  
you  just-DUPICATIVE-2.SG-keep.quiet  
“You keep quiet!

[The dead do not talk.]”

Similar contrasts between words and parts of words can be seen elsewhere in the languages. When Mr. Charles told his wife to row as fast as she could, speed was of the essence, so he used separate words for ‘hurry’ and ‘quickly’ to focus attention on it.
As the couple approached shore, Mr. Charles prepared to jump out of the boat and chase the moose. When they had beached the boat, he grabbed his gun. At this point the speed, now only a subsidiary element of his actions, was expressed with verbal suffixes, so its expression was packaged together with the acts of disembarking and reaching for the gun.

Similar choices can be seen in Mohawk. Repetition can be indicated in Mohawk either by an independent word or by a repetitive or duplicative prefix on the verb. After the exchange in (11) between the shoemaker and the corpse, the shoemaker returned to his work. But the corpse spoke up a second time, initiating a second episode. The repetition was significant enough to be expressed in a separate word.
After further exchanges the shoemaker became exasperated, jumped up, and hit the corpse on the head with his hammer. He then resumed his work. When his friends returned the following morning they were unable to wake their friend in the casket.

Each of these actions represented the resumption of an earlier activity or state, but since the recurrence was not important to the narrative, it was simply indicated by prefixes on the verbs.

(15) Mohawk repetitive prefixes: Kaia’titakhhe’ Jacobs, speaker

Tongahatkarhatén:ni’

TRANSLATIVE-FACTUAL-REPEITIVE-M.SG-MIDDLE-SIT

He turned back around,

ionsahátien

i-on-sa-h-at-ien

TRANSLOCATIVE-FACTUAL-REPEITIVE-M.SG-MIDDLE-SIT sat down again.

tanon’ gahoió’ten skén:nen’
tanon’ sa-ho-ios’t-en skén:nen’
and REPETITIVE-FACTUAL-M.SG-WORK-PERFECTIVE peacefully and worked again peacefully . . .

O:nen tontahón:ne’ ne rontén:ro’
o:nen t-on-ta-honn-e’ ne ron-atenro’
NOW DUPLICATIVE-FACTUAL-CIS-M.PL-GO the M.PL-bc.friends-STATIVE
When his friends returned . . .

iáh tehotikwénion aongahonwawiéhton
iah te-hoti-kwen-ion’ aon-sa-honwa-wie-ht-on’
not NEG-M.PL-ABLE-DISTRIBUTIVE OPTATIVE-REPEITIVE-3PL/3SG-AWAKE-CAUS-PRF they were unable to wake him up again.”
In Mohawk, persons or objects may be identified by independent nouns or by noun roots incorporated into verbs. Again the difference in the packaging of ideas reflects pragmatic function. Important new referents are typically introduced in a separate word. Once they have become an established part of the scene or constitute subsidiary information, they may be expressed simply as an element of the verb. The play between the two options can be seen in (16). In the first line the blanket is introduced with an independent noun dbhire'. In the third line the now familiar blanket, serving only as an instrument of the wrapping, is mentioned only as an element of the verb.

(16) Mohawk information flow: Konwatiën se' Jacobs, speaker

\[
\begin{align*}
Ki: & \quad rón:kwe \quad dbhire' \quad tahō:ion \\
ki:ken & \quad r-onkwe \quad dbhire' \quad t-a-ho-ion \\
this & \quad m-person \quad blanket \quad to-FACTUAL-M.SG/M.SG-give \\
ne & \quad roiën:'a \\
ne & \quad ro-i'en-'a \\
the & \quad M.SG/M.SG-be.child.of-DIMINUTIVE \\
to his son, & \\
\text{tahohsirawen:'eke'} \\
\text{t-a-ho-hsir-awen ek-e'} \\
\text{DUPLICATIVE-OPTATIVE-M.SG/M.SG-blanket-wrap-PERFECTIVE} \\
to (blanket-wrap) \\
ne & \quad rohsótha \\
ne & \quad ro-hsot-ha \\
the & \quad M.PATIENT-grandparent-DIMINUTIVE \\
the old man in.
\end{align*}
\]

Locations may also be specified in Mohawk either by independent words or by verbal prefixes. A father lent his son the family car to go to the movies with the proviso that the son was not to use it to speed around town. When word came back that the son had violated the agreement, the father was angry. The issue was the son's destination, so separate words were used when the location was mentioned.
(17) Mohawk independent words for location: Karihwenhawe’ Lazore, speaker

\[\text{ronaterihwa}l\text{sheron}\text{n}i\text{ tsi thok non:we }\]
\[\text{ron-ate-rihw-ahsheromni tsi tho-k n6n:we} \]
M.PL-MIDDLE-matter-finish that there-only place

‘They had agreed that he would go just to that place.

\[\text{i-enhakwatho’ ki:ken teioia’aksne} \]
\[\text{i-en-ha-kwatho’ ki:ken te-io-ia’k-s=ne} \]
there-FUTURE-M.SG-GO-PRF this DUPLICATIVE-NEUTER-CUT-
IMPRF=LOCATIVE
to the movies.’

When the location is less important, a verbal prefix suffices, as in (18).

(18) Mohawk verbal prefix for location: Kaia’titakhhe’ Jacobs, speaker

\[\text{O:nen o:nii’ wahatkahtho’}\]
\[\text{O:nen ohni’ wa-ha-atkahtho’}\]
now also FACTUAL-M.SG-LOOK-PERFECTIVE

‘Then he saw

\[\text{ken’ nikanohsa’ tkanohnsote’}\]
\[\text{ken’ ni-ka-nonhs-a’ t-ka-nonhs-ov-e’}\]
just SO-NEUTER-HOUSE-be.small there-NEUTER-HOUSE-stand-STATIVE

a little house standing there.’

The interplay that we see between the use of independent words for newsworthy information and parts of words for more routine or secondary information is not surprising, in light of what we know about the processes by which grammatical structures come into being. The expression of distinctions made the most often by speakers can become routinized. Over time, phrases used to express the distinctions may no longer be constructed anew with each use, but selected as prefabricated units. Their components may eventually meld and erode in substance, until they are no more than parts of words, without their original independent cognitive salience.
3. Conclusion

As we have seen, the amount of information packaged within a word can vary substantially across languages. But even in languages in which a single word can contain a vast amount of information, the word shows tight phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic integrity. Cross-linguistically the word remains a cognitively salient unit of linguistic structure. Furthermore, options for distributing information over words in discourse provides speakers with devices that can be heavily exploited for communicative purposes.

Note

1. The following abbreviations appear in glosses: caus for causative, imprf for imperfective aspect, m for masculine gender, pl for plural number, prf for perfective aspect, sc for singular number, 1 for first person, 2 for second person, and 3 for third person.

References