Deconstructing Words

At least since work within Lexical Morphology and Phonology, the issue of the connection between word structure and allomorphy has been heavily investigated by morphophonologists. Recent advances within Distributed Morphology (see in particular Embick 2010) have shown that the general cyclic architecture of a phase-based Minimalist Program syntax provides the proper locality domains for the interaction of information determining contextual allomorphy, although phonology-specific notions like adjacency also play a role, restricting possible interactions even more than what might be allowed within a cyclic domain. Less well understood are the parallel issues at the syntax/semantics interface, namely the computation of possible meanings of morphemes in context. Against some recent work disputing claims in Marantz (1997, 2000) linking the domain of special meanings to phases and against recent proposals that the locality domains for phonology and semantics might differ, this paper clarifies the issues in contextual meaning determination and supports the idea that the locality domains for contextual allosem are just those for contextual allomorphy. As a specific notion of phonological adjacency further constrains allomorphic interactions, so too does a semantic specific notion of “adjacency” constrain allosemic interactions and may restrict possible interactions among morphemes even more strongly than the general cyclic architecture of phases.