

COGNITIVE MECHANISMS OF FORMATION OF MEANINGS OF DERIVED WORDS

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Abstract. Within the broad field of word formation in English, the paper outlines particular available means for production of new meanings in established forms of words in the English language. More specifically, the paper presents two major types of production of complex forms (derivation and compounding), with accompanying definitions and generalisations which are substantiated with relevant examples which are further discussed and analysed.

Keywords: English word formation, derivation, compounding.

INTRODUCTION

English appears to abound in mechanisms that help enlarge its lexis. This paper aims at outlining a number of different available means of getting new meanings of words in established forms in English by discussing possible ways to get new meanings.

The purpose of this paper, however, is not to provide an exhaustive survey of English word formation, as this has already been done by many authors. The intention, in fact, is to provide an outline of particular types of word formation in English, focusing on derivation and compounding, which closely relate to new meanings of words in the forms that have already been established. More particularly, the paper presents derivation and compounding as two major types of production of complex forms [2].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper provides an overview of the theoretical preliminaries in the field of word formation, including the definition, and it continues with the problems suggested by various authors, as there are several problems suggested by leading researchers in the field: the status and definition of word, establishment of rules, the morphology and the lexicon, the process of lexicalization, which are followed by the analysis and discussion on examples selected for the corpus in this study in the Analysis and Discussion section of the paper, with the focus on derivation and compounding

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Word formation is nowadays perceived to be such a confused area of study that it

would not be possible to write an uncontroversial introduction to the subject. Bauer recognises that much of the confusion in word formation studies is terminological.

He further acknowledges that, given the confusion that reigns at the moment, it should be borne in mind that virtually any theoretical statement about word formation is controversial.

The ways in which new words are formed, and the factors which govern their acceptance in the language, are generally taken very much for granted by the average speaker. To understand a word, it is not necessary to be aware of how it is constructed, or whether it is simple or complex, that is, whether or not it can be broken down into two or more constituents. Human beings are only able to use a word which they find new if they learn the new word together with objects or concepts it denotes. On the other hand, when new coinages are met, like shut-up-ness, talkathon etc, our reactions to them may not be readily explained. We may find them acceptable and in line with our own feelings about how words should be built up, or they may seem in some way contrary to the rules.

There are several stages a lexeme goes through, ranging from the so-called nonce formation, through institutionalisation to, finally, lexicalisation. On its path, a lexeme may start as a new complex word-form designed by a speaker simply to meet some immediate need, the next stage emerging when the nonce formation starts to be accepted by other speakers as a known lexical item. Quite typical of this stage, Bauer argues [3], is

“...that the potential ambiguity is ignored, and only some of the possible meanings of the form are used (sometimes only one). Thus, for example, there is nothing in the form telephone box to prevent it from meaning a box shaped like a telephone, a box which is located at/by a telephone, a box which functions as a telephone, and so on.”

As it appears, it is only because the item is familiar that the speaker-listener knows that it is synonymous with telephone kiosk, in the usual meaning of telephone kiosk (institutionalisation).

Bauer concludes that the lexeme enters its final stage when it takes on a form which it could not have if it had arisen by the application of productive rules. This is the stage when the lexeme is lexicalised.

Both morphology and the lexicon are considered equally important ways of providing words in a language. Aronoff and Anshen give arguments to substantiate this claim:

“In fact, the two systems, i.e. morphology and the lexicon, do have a great a great

deal to do with one another, for two simple reasons...they both provide words, and...they are independent...”

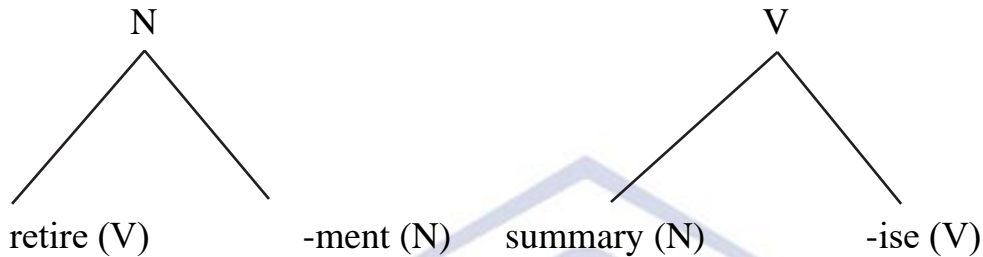
The morphology of a language, they argue, as part of grammar, trades in structural matters, dealing primarily with the internal make-up of the potential complex words of a language. The lexicon, on the other hand, of any language, is a simple listing of items that exist in that language – the items that a speaker must know, as they are arbitrary signs, hence, unpredictable in a particular way.

A good illustration of the interaction includes a simple case of the plural noun in English. It is generally known that some plural forms come from the lexicon, whereas some originate from the morphology. In case of the former, plurals are said to be originating from the lexicon simply on account of their irregularity, and stored accordingly into the individual’s mental lexicon, such as men or mice. The latter, on the other hand, encompasses plural forms coming from the morphology in case they are regular, like cups. A question arises here – how do speakers know not to say mans but men? Why is it the case that if a word has an irregular plural stored in the lexicon, there is no regular plural, the one coming from the morphology? There must be a blocking power that prevents the morphology from producing a regular plural just in case an irregular plural for the same word is in the lexicon already. The only possible conclusion we can arrive at here is that both lexicon and morphology appear to interact in making sure that only one form will be used.

Hudson [4] defines derivation as the creation of new words by the use of derivational affixes. Unlike inflectional affixes, which there are typically said to be eight in English (all are suffixes), and have very customary use, the use of derivational affixes is not obligatory. They tend to form words the meaning of which is somewhat narrower than that of their parts. A good illustration in English are result nouns, such as those ending in –ment, e.g. government, the result of governing.

An important aspect to look at when discussing derivational affixing is certainly heads and modifiers. According to Hudson, “...some derivational affixes seem to bring about changes of part of speech...”. One understanding that can be given here is that derivational affixes are the heads of their words. However, prefixes, which are also derivational affixes, do not function as heads, and are in fact hardly ever word-class changing. It should be recalled that in a noun phrase, the head is a noun, and in a verb phrase the head is the verb – the head is the essential element of a phrase, towards which other elements are modifiers. Having said that, retirement would have the structure at

the left, and summarise would have the structure at the right, below.



Here, -ment is clearly a sort of N, which obligatorily combines with verbs, and as the head of its phrase naturally yields a noun. If -ise is a verb, as head of its construction with a noun the result is a verb.

Some English examples include (Hudson: 256):

a. **geosynchronous** (geo + syn + chron + ous) ‘in time with the orbit of the earth’ (of communications satellites which stay over one point on the surface of the earth). Geo- ‘earth’, -syn- ‘alike’, -chron- ‘time’, -ous ‘suffix forming adjectives from nouns’. Like typical derivations of new words in the technical fields, all the morphemes have Greek or Latin origins.

b. **Cabledom** (cable + dom) ‘the cable television business and its sphere of influence’. The suffix -dom is quite rare, probably most encountered in the word kingdom.

c. **Energiser** (energ(y) + is + er) ‘which causes to have energy’. The suffix -ise is added to nouns to form verbs with the meaning ‘cause to have the quality of the noun’. -Er is added to verbs to make noun instruments or agents, causers of the verb, as in walker ‘instrument to help walking’.

As it has been said, in its broadest sense, derivation refers to any process which results in the creation of a new word. Beard argues that backformation could also be discussed here, given that some types of derivation do not fit into derivational lexical paradigms holding for many other bases, like the following:

re-laser, out-laser, over-laser, ... laser-er, → laser-er-s, laser-er-‘s

LASER laser-ing → laser-ing-s, laser-ing-‘s(un)laser-able → (un)laser-abil-ity

They argue that the result of misanalysis of words when a phonological sequence identical with that of an affix is misperceived as that particular affix is that a previously non-existent underlying base is extracted and stored in the lexicon via backformation.

CONCLUSION

The variety of mechanisms that English offers for the production of new words, which have been presented in the paper, as well as the numerous corresponding examples, have shown what qualifies English as a language medium which is universally intelligible. English thus continues to occupy the position of the world's first language.

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