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WORD-FORMATION IN ENGLISH

BY INGO PLAG

Ingo Plag, *Word-Formation in English,* Cambridge, CUP, 2003, 240

The objective of the book *Word-formation in English* (2003) by Ingo Plag is to analyse the internal structure of complex words and to define the rules and restrictions for generating new words in English, as well as to establish how complex words in English are related to other words. Early in the book it becomes evident that the mechanisms operating in the language regarding complex words are not always straightforward, that there are various linguistic approaches to word-formation and that certain issues are still disputable and certain phenomena still unaccounted for.

The book treats all the issues systematically and thoroughly, offering profound insights in rather advanced, contemporary, but sometimes mutually opposing and exclusive theories relevant for the issues discussed. For pedagogical reasons Plag avoids following any particular theoretical position or favouring a single linguistic approach, making references to an extensive number of other authors and the theories they represent in order to provide a comprehensive insight into the matter.

The book consists of seven chapters and each is a step further into the analysis of word-formation, starting with definitions of basic notions (Chapter 1) to in-depth discussions of complex theoretical issues (Chapter 7), as the target group of readers are primarily university students, and the author's presupposition is that the target group of readers might have no extensive background knowledge of morphology and word formation. Each of the seven chapters is organised in the same way – with a short summary, recommended further reading, and exercises at the end of each chapter.

Chapter 1 (Basic concepts) introduces the readers to the basic terms and concepts related to morphology and word-formation. Plag describes the criteria for defining words: the orthographic, phonological, semantic and syntactic criteria, as well as the criterion of internal integrity. Basic notions regarding word-formation necessary for further language analyses are also presented, briefly discussed and exemplified (the notions of complex words, bound and free morphemes, affixes, prefixes and suffixes, bases, roots and stems, derivatives, and infixes), as well as different mechanisms of word-formation (compounding, concatenative and non-concatenative processes, and other mechanisms that are discussed in more detail later in the book).

Chapter 2 (Studying complex words) discusses theoretical problems related to the definition of a morpheme as a minimal unit of form and meaning, as it is not always possible to make one-to-one mapping of the two, for example, in the process of conversion (there is a change of meaning, but no visible change, *to book* and *a book*), vowel alternation processes (*foot* and *feet*, *swim* and *swam*), and so on. This chapter also introduces the phenomenon of allomorphy, and the notions pertinent to it (phonological and morphological conditioning, complementary distribution, morpho-phonological alternations, and others). The chapter then proceeds with establishing tendencies, rules, as well as restrictions for generating new words. The author at this point also presents instances of complex words formed by the rules not productive any more, here referred to as redundancy rules, for example, lexical conditioning (e.g. suffix *–th*), or the instances of generating new words with no established word-formation rule, illustrated with back-formation (e.g. the verb *edit* derived from the noun *editor*). The discussion ends with the issue of multiple affixation and the internal structure of complex words so derived.

Chapter 3 (Productivity and the mental lexicon) provides a comprehensive analysis of productivity of affixes, starting with definitions of productivity and possible and actual words. The chapter proceeds with the models of morphological processing explaining how morphologically complex words are accessed in the mental lexicon (the whole-word route versus the decomposition route). Plag also presents methods of measuring productivity (explained in more detail later in this paper). Finally, the author discusses pragmatic and structural restrictions on productivity (e.g. *arrival* and *denial* vs. *entral* or *forwardal*, the latter being non-existent due to structural, i.e. phonological restrictions), which are rule-governed, as well as the mechanism of token-blocking (e.g. impossibility of the words *stealer*, or *liver,* the latter meaning 'the one who lives').

Chapter 4 (Affixation) studies the properties of affixes in English. Firstly, certain general, mainly phonological properties of affixes are discussed, as well as phonological changes suffixes might impose. This section is followed by a list of selected prefixes and suffixes briefly described in terms of their properties, primarily their usage and meaning. Suffixes are grouped according to the word category the derived complex word denotes: nominal, verbal, adjectival and adverbial. On the other hand, prefixes (as generally non-category-changing) are classified semantically: quantifying, locative, temporal and negative prefixes, with the last group being presented in detail (prefixes *a-* or *an-, anti-, de-, dis-, in-, mis-, non-, un-*), as they exhibit particular and complex behaviour, often with their domains overlapping. Finally, the discussion ends with a short overview of infixation which is a marginal phenomenon in English, as there are no bound morphs which could be determined as infixes, and it is still disputed whether expletive infixation (*abso-blooming-lutely*) should be studied within the field of word-formation.

Chapter 5 (Derivation without affixation) provides an overview of non-concatenative processes: conversion, processes studied within the prosodic morphology (truncations and blends), and abbreviations (and acronyms). These language mechanisms might at first sight seem to lack regularity, but after further in-depth analyses they prove to be highly systematic and predictable. Conversion

(for example, the noun *the water* and the verb *to water*), defined as "the derivation of a new word without any overt marking" (Plag 2003: 107), is examined separately as a disputed phenomenon in morphology. Therefore, the author discusses the problems of directionality, existence of zero-affixation and the issue of whether the phenomenon of conversion should be analysed in the scope of syntax or morphology (it is argued that conversion is predominantly a morphological process). Abbreviations (e.g. *FBI*) and acronyms (*NATO*) presented in the last chapter are compared with truncations (*Liz, Robbie*) and blends (*brunch*), as they are also related to loss and not to addition of material (it is pointed out, however, that for the former processes it is the orthographic and not the prosodic features that are essential).

Chapter 6 (Compounding) analyses compounds, numerous features of which are still the subject of unsettled arguments in theory. Firstly, the chapter examines their common internal structure: their binary structure, recursivity, headedness and stress patterns. The chapter proceeds with classification of compounds according to the nature of their heads: nominal (*book cover*), verbal (*broadcast*) and adjectival (*class-conscious*). Nominal compounds are discussed in detail, starting with classification according to the category of their non-head, and elaborating the analysis on classification based on the semantic relations between the constituents: endocentric (*laser printer*), exocentric (*spoilsport*) and possessive as a subgroup of the latter (*loudmouth*), as well as copulative: appositional (*scientist-explorer*) and coordinative (*a modifier-head structure*). Special attention is drawn to noun-noun compounds and their ambiguity and possible interpretations, introducing the idea of argument linking for the purposes of interpretation i.e. the idea that interpretation depends on the argument structure of the head.

Chapter 7 (Theoretical issues: modelling word-formation) is devoted to theoretical issues relevant to the discussions from the previous six chapters. Firstly, the theory of Lexical Phonology is discussed (explaining how phonology is related to word-formation processes). The chapter proceeds with the presentation of two different approaches to word-formation rules: word-based and morpheme-based morphology (former analysing how linguistic elements are combined to form larger units, while the latter assumes examining morphologically related words in order to establish the rules).

The first edition of the book *Word-formation in English* was published in 2003, and accordingly, this book to a great extent uses the advantages of modern developments in the research methodology. For instance, in Chapter 3 the author introduces corpora, i.e. large representative collections of written and spoken text in electronic form. The corpus (*British National Corpus*) is used in order to determine productivity of the morphological category of affixes through detecting affixes in neologisms (e.g. *abusable, admissable*). In the same chapter the author also refers to using statistical data acquired from CD-ROM versions of dictionaries (*Oxford English Dictionary*). By using this methodological tool it is possible, for example, to determine very easily when a certain word was firstly attested in a dictionary (useful again for determining productivity of certain morphological categories). In Chapter 4 there are thorough instructions on using computer programs for CD-ROM versions of dictionaries for extracting the items relevant for the search.

This book is therefore an excellent introduction to modern methods of language analysis: the methods which offer vast possibilities and which encourage both students and teachers to make research on their own. The author also provides exercises (basic and advanced) at the end of each unit, together with extensive explanations in the answer keys, offering students the possibility to make their own analyses based on the theories discussed in the book.

In conclusion, this book is an excellent example of a comprehensive and highly systematic textbook on word-formation in English. Although it is primarily aimed at university students, it is also valuable reference material for linguists involved in studying the field of morphology, as it points to most recent advances as well as outstanding disagreements regarding this linguistic discipline.