

Plag, Ingo (2003) *Word-Formation in English*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics.

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SYNOPSIS

This textbook offers an introduction to the study of word formation using English as the subject language. It is aimed mainly for students 'with little or no prior linguistic knowledge', because it offers in a very accessible way all the basic concepts that underlie the formation of words. At the same time, it encourages the student to engage him/herself in conducting their own study of word formation phenomena, by thoroughly referring to up-to-date methodology in morphological research and through a number of exercises. It consists of seven chapters, each of them ending in a brief summary, suggestions for further reading and a set of exercises. It is a very good book that also makes an excellent textbook not only for the variety of topics it covers, but mainly for their way of presentation.

After a brief introduction which serves as a quick look through the contents of the book for its optimal use, Chapter 1 (Basic Concepts) introduces the reader to word formation by presenting some basic concepts. It begins with defining the notion of 'word', through the application of orthographical, semantic, phonological, syntactic and 'word integrity' criteria, without being very scholarly about the definition of 'word', but rather trying to familiarize the reader as much as possible with this linguistic entity. Then, the real study of word formation begins with the introduction of the relevant terminology (complex words, free and bound morphemes, root, stem, base, prefix, suffix, affix, derivative, infix) through a look at a number of examples. A brief presentation of the processes that morphological entities are involved in follows, such as compounding, concatenation, conversion, zero-affixation, transposition (the last three presented as equals at this stage), truncation, clipping,

diminutives, blends, acronyms and abbreviation, all of which are separately presented and explained later in the book. The chapter ends with a distinction between inflection and derivation, through a thorough and precise comparative analysis, concluding with the placement of inflection outside the realm of word formation.

Chapter 2 (Studying complex words) discusses the complications that arise in the actual analysis of some cases in word formation of English. The morpheme is presented as a unit of form and meaning, a minimal linguistic sign that combines with another into compositional expressions with identifiable form and meaning. Other types of combination of morphemes with different implications on the mapping of form and meaning are then discussed under this prism, such as conversion, extended exponence and vowel alternation resulting to addition of meaning, all presented as problematic cases in this respect. The case of bound roots of Latinate origin (e.g. -fer, -ceive, etc.) is extensively discussed also as a problematic case under the same prism. The case of allomorphy is presented in the next section, both base and affix allomorphy, along with the morphologically and phonologically conditioned and complementary distribution of allomorphs. The next topic is the establishment of word-formation rules, with all the important methodological and theoretical considerations in the process of constructing them, presented and explained through an analysis of the prefix un- towards the formulation of the relevant word formation rule(s). Word formation rules are then juxtaposed with redundancy rules and then analogy is presented as an alternative view. The chapter ends with the presentation of cases of multiple affixation, the complexity of which is best explained through tree diagrams and bracketing.

Chapter 3 (Productivity and the mental lexicon), discusses the productivity of affixes, beginning with a short section on the definition of productivity and the important distinction between actual and possible words in the mental lexicon of the speakers of a language. The next section looks deeper into the mental lexicon, the representation, storage and processing of words (whole-word or decomposition route), by bringing data from psycholinguistic research and presenting a number of examples. It ends with a special focus on the frequency of occurrence of a word, which gives the author the

opportunity to make reference to the corpora as media for measuring the frequency. In the next section the major topic of measuring productivity is dealt with, with the presentation and evaluation of different methods and angles for measuring productivity, all of them being related to the notion of frequency (type frequency, token frequency, extent of use, etc.). In a description of measuring the productivity of the suffix -able, through the application of different methods and the use of tools such as dictionaries and a corpus, the author concludes that each measure highlights a different aspect of productivity. The final section presents and discusses those factors that constrain productivity, namely the pragmatic and structural restrictions that prevent all 'potentially useful words' from being 'actually created and used' (p.60). At last blocking is extensively discussed, focusing on the distinction and the discussion of the different types of blocking (homonymy and synonymy blocking, type and token blocking).

Chapter 4 (Affixation) is the first of the three chapters that concentrate on each of the word formation processes. The notion of 'affix' is attempted to be defined in greater detail, through the presentation of problematic cases that aim at distinguishing firstly between free and bound morphemes and secondly between affixes and combining forms such as the neoclassical elements. The next section concentrates on issues of methodology for the study of affixes. Beginning with reverse dictionaries, the discussion focuses on the electronic version of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) with specific guidelines for its optimal use. Possible queries for the retrieval of data for the suffix -ment in the OED and the BNC format are presented. The next section discusses common features exhibited by English affixes, especially on their phonological properties and the possible generalizations on the types of suffixes that 'may trigger phonological alternations' (p.80). For this reason, a long part of this section is devoted to the familiarization of the reader with the notion of the 'prosodic structure' of words, explained with all the necessary details, the use of a number of examples. Certain properties of affixes of etymological nature that play a role in word formation are then presented. The rest of the chapter contains a one-by-one presentation of a great number of suffixes and some prefixes of English. The suffixes are grouped according to the

grammatical category of the derivative they create and their description contains basic information on their semantics, their morphology and their structural restrictions (p.80). This account on affixes is mainly descriptive, giving this part of the book 'the character of a reference text' (p.86), as the author also points out, of the book as a whole. The chapter ends with the discussion of infixation and its ambiguous status in the realm of word formation, mainly due to its restricted presence in English.

Chapter 5 (Derivation without affixation) deals with non-affixational word formation processes, such as conversion, truncation, clipping and abbreviation, which are here looked upon in greater detail. The first section deals with conversion and some major theoretical problems raised by it, presented in separate sub-sections (directionality of conversion, zero-morphs, morphological or syntactic nature of conversion), while possible ways of resolving them are proposed. The next section titled 'Prosodic Morphology' contains those non-affixational processes where prosody plays a great role, namely truncations and blends. Through an extensive discussion and a number of examples, the author argues against those views that want to exclude these processes from the regular word formation processes and what has been called 'grammatical morphology' (p.126). Abbreviations and acronyms are lastly presented as similar to truncation and blending processes, with a major difference, that orthography, rather than prosody plays a great role here.

Chapter 6 (Compounding) deals exclusively with the case of compounding, recognizing compounds as 'binary structures' (p.134). The modifier-head structure, the right-hand headedness and the feature percolation that results from these, are presented as characteristic features of compounds that distinguish them from lexicalized phrases. Stress is another such feature also presented, together with the possible stress patterns in compounds consisting of more than two elements and their interpretations. The chapter then looks into the possible combinations of grammatical categories that can appear in a compound. The following section, quite a long one, deals exclusively with nominal compounds and different types of them are analyzed in great detail (endocentric vs exocentric, possessive and copulative, appositional vs. coordinative), as well as

the challenges they bring to the general properties of compounds stated earlier. More canonical endocentric compounds are next discussed from a semantic viewpoint, examining a combination of important factors. Adjectival, verbal and neoclassical compounds are presented and discussed in separate sub-sections and from all aspects, such as combination and stress patterns. Similarly with conversion, the last section of compounding deals with ''the question of whether compounds are morphological or syntactic objects'' (p.160) which is discussed in great length applying criteria, presenting arguments for and against the two views and finally suggesting an answer in favour of the morphological view, pointing out though that the absence of a well-defined theory of syntax is a major drawback for the problem's solution.

The last chapter of the book (Theoretical issues: modeling word formation) presents and discusses prevalent theories developed on word formation. Beginning with some words, aimed mainly for students, on the necessity of the formulation of an precise and efficient theory, the chapter continues with the description and discussion of the theoretical background of the interaction between morphology and phonology, beginning with the theory of Lexical Phonology. The author describes in few words how the theory emerged and outlines its basic concepts. Cyclic morphological rules and level-ordering are thoroughly explained. The advantages of the theory along with the solutions it offers in certain problem areas are presented next, while the following sub-section comes to criticize the theory, presenting its inadequacy by leaving certain phenomena unaccounted for. The next sub-section presents some alternative theories and brings up-to-date findings from psycholinguistic research. According to Plag (1999) and Fabb (1988), a theory that ''focuses on suffix-particular affix-driven and base-driven restrictions'' (p.175)* proves to be more adequate in the solution of empirical problems than a solely affix-driven theory. Moreover, an approach that relies on the segmentability of affixes, according to Hay (2002), and the consideration of the relative frequency between the base and its derivative as an important factor can lead to important generalizations about suffixes.

In the last half of the chapter, the nature of word-formation rules, which have already been used in previous chapters, is more

systematically discussed, as 'a mechanism or device that, speaking in very general terms, relates complex words to each other'. However, a device that 'can be conceptualized very differently according to different theories' (p. 179)*. To illustrate this, the author contradicts the two theories pertinent to this issue, namely the morpheme-based and the word-based theory. Devoting the same length of text, to the presentation and discussion of each of them, the discussion starts with the morpheme-based, focusing on the word-syntax approach, and pinpointing its advantages in the analysis of affixational morphology, and its weaknesses in non-affixational processes. The discussion of the word-based theory, which follows, focuses on the construction of morphological schemata, and analyses their advantages in the analysis of both affixational and non-affixational morphology, compared to word-formation rules. Although, obviously being in favour of the word-based theory, the author ends the chapter and the whole book, admitting the necessity of both models and proposing a synthesis of the two views, which would serve for more empirical adequacy.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Sixteen years after publishing Laurie Bauer's 'English Word-Formation' (1988), the same series come with the publication of Ingo Plag's book on the same topic under a slightly different title, 'Word-Formation in English'. The two books are quite different, both due to the progress in the study of word formation, but also due to the different style of presentation. This book resembles a long discussion on the topic of word-formation in English and its study, rather than a neat, one-by-one account of the different phenomena, processes and problems. This does not mean that it is not well structured. On the contrary, as it can be seen from the order of the seven chapters of the book, it resembles any other book on English word-formation. What is important is what is going on inside each chapter. The author has adopted throughout the whole book a 'problem-oriented didactic approach' (p.86). The problematic cases are not presented as marginal ones, but as facts along with the more canonical cases. An advantage of this problem-oriented approach is that offers the reader the opportunity to consider the problematic areas and urges him/her to engage actively in the study of word

formation. In general it is very welcoming in this respect.

The book is very readable both as a textbook and as an up-to-date reference on word-formation processes in English. It has a simple language and a straightforward style that is free from complexities, features that are very important for a textbook. It was written without a particular theoretical framework in mind, and in general, theory is avoided throughout the whole book (apart from Chapter 7, which deals specifically with theoretical issues), with the various facts, processes and problems being presented as neutrally as possible, using only the necessary amount of terminology, however without being inadequate in this respect. Another point that was stated earlier and can be seen in the synopsis, is that the book familiarizes the reader to a great extent with the up-to-date methodology and tools for conducting research in the field of word-formation. Sometimes whole sections, intended for this purpose, such as guidelines for using the BNC for measuring productivity or the CD-ROM version of the OED in search of neologisms with a certain suffix, especially in the middle of a chapter explaining productivity or affixation, at first might look as irrelevant or as being 'too practical' for the matters being discussed. In my opinion, this is not the case though, as apart from the familiarization issue, the author indicates and emphasizes, sometimes in a very straightforward way, how important the correct use of the available research tools is in drawing correct conclusions.

The great advantage of this book, in my opinion, is that it literally is intended also for readers with 'with little or no prior linguistic knowledge'. This is evident in the way every piece of information is presented not only those relating to word formation or morphology, but also those relating to other areas of linguistics, such as syntax or semantics. For example for the explanation of the approach of 'word syntax', in chapter 7, the 'little bit of syntactic theory' that is necessary, is provided inside the book. Another strong feature of this book is the section of the exercises that ends every chapter. These exercises are divided into two levels (beginner and advanced) and apart from helping the student assimilate the information provided in each chapter, they also urge him/her to conduct a kind of a short study on certain phenomena. Certain things might be presented slightly

simplified for the needs of an exercise, but by no means does this disillusion the student. The answer key is also very valuable, as the answers to the exercises are very analytically presented, even if this means having to repeat things already presented inside each chapter.

In general terms, in this book the author succeeds in what is a prerequisite for a textbook in order to be good: get in the position of the student, distance oneself from all the acquired knowledge and explain things anew. Someone reading it, feels quite knowledgeable not only about the principles of English word formation, but also about the study of word formation in general.

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ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Evanthia Petropoulou has participated in the SNSF-Research Program "Word Formation as a Structuring Device in English and Italian Lexicons: A large-scale exploration", at the University of Basel, as a research lexicographer. Her main research interest is on combining forms of neoclassical origin and their status in word-formation systems of various European languages. At the moment she teaches English in Greece, trying at the same time to find ways to continue her research and complete a PhD thesis.

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