



Hans Sauer, *in memoriam*\*

*Kerstin Majewski*

## Introduction to the Proceedings of the 2023 Symposium 'Historical English Word-Formation'

It has not yet been ten years since Klaus Dietz (2015: 1915) prophesised that

[f]uture research work [on historical word-formation in English] will profit by two kinds of new instruments: firstly, by the *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE) and its *Web Corpus*, by the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) and by the nascent third edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), and secondly, by new corpora of historical English.

The proceedings of the 2023 symposium respond to those predictions in manifold ways. Under the heading 'Historical English Word-Formation', the organisers of the symposium intended to “bring together researchers studying diachronic English word-formation and to showcase current research in this area” (Majewski 2023: 287). Although no particular temporal, thematic, or methodological focus was asked for, the five essays provide answers to some of the general questions that the symposium had initially raised, namely: How have large-scale corpus analyses and respective computational tools helped us study diachronic changes in the formation of new words?<sup>1</sup> Which recent insights are there into the frequency and productivity as well as the rules and restrictions of word-formation units and patterns in the history of English? Further, which roles do regional, social, medial, and

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\* As guest editor of the present issue of *Zeitschrift für Wortbildung/Journal for Word Formation* I wish to dedicate this issue to the late Professor Hans Sauer (1946–2022). He had encouraged me to co-organise with him the symposium on historical English word-formation at LMU Munich, which resulted in the present publication. I am immensely grateful for all the support and help he had offered me over the past years. Hans Sauer himself had published widely in the field of historical English word-formation; see the list of publications in Bauer & Krischke (2011) as well as in his *Gedenkschrift* (Bauer et al. 2023). A collection of his essays on binomials in the history of English is going to be published posthumously (Sauer 2024, in print).

<sup>1</sup> An early study is Dalton-Puffer (1996), one of the more recent ones is Säily (2018).

other factors as well as text-types and (non-)literary genres play for the creation of new words?<sup>2</sup> The five contributions to this special issue of *ZWJW* illustrate that, as Dietz had anticipated, the study of word-formations in past stages of English has profited extremely from the advances made in computational research and Artificial Intelligence, yet they also delineate both their advantages and limitations.

**Katrin Menzel's** "systematic, corpus-based analysis" of data in the *Royal Society Corpus* shows "the evolving role of scientific initialisms in English academic writing in the 19th and early 20th centuries", using token frequency counts, topic modelling, and "information-theoretic surprisal values of initialisms" (8). These methods allow her to conclude that between 1830 and 1919, there was "a significant increase in both the frequency and variety of initialisms for scientific concepts" with initialisms becoming "common shortcuts for multi-word units with wordhood and term status across various natural science disciplines" (8).

**Hagen Peukert's** article begins with a discussion of some difficulties that computational analysis can entail.<sup>3</sup> A little less than 20 years ago, Dieter Kastovsky (2007) had addressed several lacunae in the research of Middle English word-formation. Scholars have been working towards closing some of those gaps,<sup>4</sup> yet "extensive dialectal differences" (Kastovsky 2007: 43) continue to be a major challenge when dealing with data in large-scale electronic corpora. There are more and more AI-tools available, but they have not been able to satisfactorily deal with Middle English orthographic variety. As Peukert explains (see his Section 2), many tools are unable to segment and analyse derivational morphemes correctly because at times they do not recognise whether a certain affix is part of a sequence or whether and when it attaches to certain word-classes only. The extraction of "reliable data on affixes over the last 700 years from text corpora" was eventually possible

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, Gardner's (2014) and Säily's (2014) monographs look into regional, sociolinguistic, and genre-related factors. Semantic studies are those by Lloyd (2011) for Middle English, and Fisiak & Bator (2013) for historical English more generally. See further Trips (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Another example for the at times limited scope and accessibility of the "new instruments" Dietz had commented on is the Dictionary of Old English Project at the University of Toronto which had until very recently only published the dictionary entries from *A* to the letter *I*. As I was writing this introduction, a brand new version of the *DOE*, covering letters *A–Le*, was launched on 22 July. The editors also announced a new version of their *Web Corpus* to be coming soon.

<sup>4</sup> Dalton-Puffer (1996) is one of the first large-scale corpus-based studies, followed by Ciszek (2008) and Gardner (2014).

when “access to the OED RESTful API [was granted. This] made the crucial difference for automating the entire extraction process and hence produce the data that would allow for answering more detailed questions in the future on how the mechanisms of derivation in English work” (49).

Several of the here gathered essays furthermore illustrate that in-depth contextualisation, i.e. the analysis of word-formations in the source text and within the immediate and larger literary and/or socio-cultural context(s), are also essential for gaining the required results. For instance, **Daniela Fruscione & Letizia Vezzosi** offer the first systematic overview of compounds contained in the Old English Laws from King Æthelberht of Kent (7th cent.) up to those made under King Cnut the Great (10th/11th cent.). This specialised lexical material revealed several peculiarities,

on the one hand because of opaque, unclear, and unpredictable semantic relationships between their constituents, and on the other hand because of the high incidence of words occurring once and *hapax legomena*. All these peculiarities appear to be less peculiar if one thinks that compounding in the early laws was a means for the development of a legal terminology (63).

The authors’ ‘deep-dive’ into (largely nominal) compounding in early English laws enabled them to sketch developments and changes in Anglo-Saxon society between the 7th and 11th centuries reflected in the Old English legal vocabulary. Fruscione & Vezzosi’s study also reminds us that, although a vast amount of texts in Old, Middle, and (Early) Modern English verse and prose is now available in electronic form, several literary and non-literary texts do not yet form part of established electronic corpora such as the *Parsed Corpus of Middle English Poetry*<sup>5</sup> or the *Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English*<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, certain genre-specific or author-specific studies require manual compilation and analysis because a broader understanding of certain phenomena can sometimes only be achieved by focussing on one specific text (or text-type) and/or author.

**Ursula Lenker**’s contribution is concerned with the origin of the suffix *-ly*, the Present-Day English “adverbial signature”. She remarks that “corpora do not allow for a comparison of manuscript variants to the Latin exemplar, such as manuscripts H and C of the Old

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<sup>5</sup> The PCMEP currently comprises 53 Middle English poems.

<sup>6</sup> Containing the second edition of the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English* (PPCME2) and the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* (PPCEME). For other parsed corpora of historical English, see <https://www.ling.upenn.edu/histcorpora/other-corpora.html>.

English translations of the *Theodulfi Capitula*” (77, fn. 5). By means of a comprehensive textual analysis of two late Old English translations of the *Theodulfi Capitula* and of the early Middle English poem *The Owl and the Nightingale*, she is able to “test the more general findings [...] regarding the diversification of adverbs in the history of English, in particular the more recent uses of subjective sentential adverbs such as stance and linking adverbs” (78).

Last but not least, it should be highlighted that engaging with and employing innovative interdisciplinary approaches can be fruitful for the study of historical English word-formation as well, complementing traditional concepts and methodologies, as **Mihaela Buzec** demonstrates in her proposal of a cognitive linguistic framework for the study of Old English kennings. She suggests that when poets compose or recite Old English poetry, they employ kennings (circumlocutions of a certain semantic concept, usually in the form of complex nouns) according to semantic associations in ways similar to the word-retrieval of patients suffering from anomia (the inability to name a certain referent). Buzec explains that by applying the framework of Semantic Feature Analysis, “kennings would be interpreted as a result of semantic feature association, and they would function as a basis for building semantic networks and offering clues for the specific contexts in which they appear” (112).

All in all, the proceedings of the 2023 symposium ‘Historical English Word-Formation’ gathered in this special issue of *ZWJW* hope to contribute to the broadly diversified and thriving field of diachronic word-formation in English.

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Kerstin Majewski

Juniorprofessorin für Anglistik, insbesondere Mediävistik

Englisches Seminar, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Universitätsstraße 150

D-44801 Bochum

[kerstin.majewski@rub.de](mailto:kerstin.majewski@rub.de)



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