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Conference Report:  
Symposium “Historical English Word-Formation”  
(17–18 February, 2023; Munich, Germany)

The symposium “Historical English Word-Formation” took place on 17 and 18 February 2023 at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) in Munich, Germany. It was organised by the author of the present report and held in memory of the late Prof. Dr. Hans Sauer. The aim was to bring together researchers studying diachronic English word-formation and to showcase current research in this area. Sixteen years ago, it was claimed that diachronic studies of word-formation, especially on the Middle English period, were a desideratum (Kastovsky 2007). The speakers of two plenary sessions and fourteen papers, however, demonstrated that historical word-formation – not least because of the availability of a vast amount of digitised material and large historical corpora – has become a thriving research area. The contributions covered word-formations across a wide variety of text-types and registers, applying different theories and quantitative as well as qualitative methods, and thus offered a great diversity of perspectives. On day one (17 February), five papers focused on the Old English period (c. 700–1100). The second day (18 February) included studies on word-formations in Middle English (c. 1100–1500) as well as Early (c. 1500–1800) and Late Modern English (c. 1800–present).

The event opened with **Mariia Flaksman**’s (LMU Munich) contribution “Onomatopoeic Word-Formations in Old English”. Drawing on classifications from previous research, she explained that onomatopoeic words often have an unclear morphological status and discussed whether they should be considered as a means of word-formation at all. Her latest research (Flaksman 2022) demonstrates that most Old English imitative words are found in glosses, but that only a small percentage are imitative by origin (e.g., OE *cracian* > PDE

*crack*). Furthermore, Old English onomatopoetic words rarely appear in clusters, except in the elegies and riddles of the Exeter Book as well as in heroic poetry (cf. Riddle 24: OE *blætan* ‘bleat’, *beorcan* ‘bark’, *giellan* ‘yell’). A further point she addressed was the disappearance of native (Germanic) onomatopoeia in the history of English: More than half of the Old English imitative words died out (e.g., OE *swinsian* ‘to produce a melody’). One of the reasons for their loss might be a change in literary genres and styles. Overall, she argued that the development of onomatopoeic words and their coinages are influenced by a variety of language-internal factors (e.g., changes in the sound-system, in the rules of phonotactics, or in morphology).

The second paper invited the audience to “Dig into Old English Legal Compounds”. **Daniela Fruscione** (Goethe University Frankfurt a. M.) and **Letizia Vezzosi** (University of Florence) showed that the Anglo-Saxons, who were the first among the Germanic peoples to codify their laws in the vernacular, created new lexical items in their legal codes through nominal compounding and affixation. The authors presented analyses of various compounds in the law codices of the Kentish kings Æþelbert (c. 550–616), Hlothhere († 685) and Eadric († 686/7), Wihtred (c. 670–725), and of the West-Saxon kings Alfred the Great (871–899) and Ine († c. 726). They detected a profound consistency in the use of compounds and demonstrated that between the earliest texts and later ones, the creation of new compound words gives intriguing insight into legal as well as societal changes in Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. For example, OE *feohfang* can be analysed as a type of *fang* ‘taking money’, but it came to mean ‘the fine for taking money (bribe)’; similarly, *healsfang* was originally a form of corporal punishment (‘seizing by the neck’) and became ‘a legal payment to be paid as a fine’; in a metonymic change, the action to which the law attaches a penalty became the standard word for a fine.

In his plenary speech “The Interface of Old English Dictionaries (IOED) in Database Format: Integrating Derivational Morphology”, **Javier Martín Arista** (University of La Rioja) described his ongoing project IOED. This is a relational database which seeks to bring the data in various Old English dictionaries into a comparable form, both at type and at token levels. This is done by relating a headword in one dictionary to its counterparts in other dictionaries and by relating headwords with the same inflectional forms from the same lexical category across dictionaries. An extended version of the database makes it

possible to compare the most widely used corpora of Old English. Javier Martín Arista also discussed the incorporation of morphological relatedness in this database. This was the first of many talks at the Munich symposium that showed how fruitful and necessary corpus linguistics have become for research in historical English word-formation.

The topic of “Old English Occasional Word-Formation: Language Rules, External Influence, and Personal Choices” was explored by **Yekaterina Yakovenko** (Russian Academy of Sciences). On the example of Ælfric’s (955–1020) *Grammar* (*Excerptiones de arte grammatica anglie*), which goes back to Latin grammars, she addressed the late Old English word-building processes in linguistic terminology. Ælfric’s metalanguage contains loans, loan translations, and periphrastic expressions (e.g., Lat. *modus* – OE *gemet*; Lat. *infinitivus* – OE *ungeendigendlic*; Lat. *appellativum* – OE *ælc oþer nama*). From a sociolinguistic perspective, these new words arose in a highly educated and cultured environment, which was characterised by cross-linguistic contact (Old English and Latin). Ælfric shows a clear preference for semantic loans and loan translations, which Yekaterina Yakovenko also sees in grammatical treatises in other Germanic languages. Thus, most of his terminology maintains a morphological conformity to the Old English lexical system.

The first day of the symposium concluded with **Mihaela Buzec**’s (Babeş-Bolyai University) contribution “Beyond Rhetoric: The Semantic Components of Kennings and their Role in Aiding Word Retrieval in Oral Old English Poetry”. She followed the definition of kenningar in Old English poetry as metaphoric substitutes expressed by nominal compounds. Mihaela Buzec explored the similarities between Old English kenningar functioning as mnemonic devices and characteristics of semantic feature analysis used in the therapy of aphasia and anomia to improve word retrieval in post-stroke patients. Her paper thus brought together the formal and semantic properties of Old English nominal compounding with methods in cognitive linguistics, showing how cognitive linguistics can serve as a framework for the diachronic study of poetic language.

Day two of the symposium was initiated by **Hagen Peukert** (University of Hamburg), who spoke about “Lexical Affix Productivity in the History of English: A Quantitative Approach”. He has attempted to collect representational quantitative data on the frequency of more than 300 types of lexical affixes from Old to Present-Day English. He first provided a summary of the computational approaches made so far (e.g., type frequencies to attest

certain affixes with the help of a semi-automatic toolset; a community-based approach for intermediate databases; cf. Peukert 2014; 2016; 2018). Then he discussed the most recent results obtained with the help of the *OED*’s RESTful API (e.g., that the rise in token frequencies of prefixes after the Middle English period suggest that English came to have more characteristics of a prefixing language). One of the central questions was whether Artificial Intelligence can aid identifying individual morphemes in the Middle English lexicon, a period where there was no written Standard but an enormous amount of spelling variations. Overall, his paper showed both the advantages and limitations of corpus and computational linguistics for the analysis of historical language stages.

Another corpus-based study was conducted by **Susanne Lang** (University of Mannheim) on the “Middle English Derivational Suffix *-fien*”, summarising the findings of her recently published paper (Lang 2022). In Present-Day English, the suffix *-fy* (< ME *-fien*) is used to form causative verbs (e.g., *falsify* < ME *falsifien* ‘to prove (something) to be untrue’). Susanne Lang traced the origin of this function by obtaining data from three Middle English electronic corpora (*The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English 2*, *The Parsed Corpus of Middle English Poetry*, and *The Parsed Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English*). She found that its Middle English derivatives pertain to “three main classes [...] that represent the three main patterns in which the suffix *-fien* occurs. It either denotes a causative meaning, an abstract causative meaning, or a non-causative meaning” (Lang 2022: 43). So, *-fien* generates not only prototypically causative verbs but also polysemous ones such as *pūrifien* (> PDE *purify*) ‘to cleanse; to free the soul from sin or guilt’ and non-causative ones like *specifien* (> PDE *specify*).

The importance of sociolinguistic factors, especially of gender, for “[t]he Decline of *-ment*” was investigated by **Tanja Säily** (University of Helsinki) and her colleagues **Martin Hilpert** (University of Neuchâtel) and **Jukka Suomela** (Aalto University). The suffix *-ment* is a borrowing from French. While its productivity reached a peak in the 16th century, it is rather unproductive today. Tanja Säily sought to find out whether gender played a role in the development of different patterns of *V-ment* (cf. Hilpert 2013), drawing on data from the 200-million-word fiction section of the *Corpus of Historical American English* (1810–2009) and using metadata by Öhman et al. (2019). Her results suggest that

women use *-ment* significantly less productively than men, which may relate to women's tendency to employ a more personally involved style of writing (cf. Biber & Burges 2000).

**Ursula Lenker** (LMU Munich) investigated “Morphologically Marking Epistemicity in the History of English: English *-ly* and the Functional Diversification of English Adverbs”. The suffix *-ly* (morphologically, a re-analysis of Old English {-*līc*} (adj.) + {-*e*}) is *the* adverbial ending *per se* in Present-Day English. Yet, the functional reasons for its emergence and establishment have not been explained in much detail. In a case study based on Hans Sauer's editions of *Theodulfi Capitula* (1978) and *The Owl and the Nightingale* (1983), Ursula Lenker compared Old and Middle English strategies for marking epistemicity and evidentiality with those from Early Modern English onwards. In Old and Middle English, stance was mainly expressed by the subjunctive or by impersonal constructions and not by adverbs; the loss of the former was compensated for by a diversification of adverbs. So, Ursula Lenker argues that the development of *-ly* is ultimately connected to signalling speaker attitude.

**Paula Rodríguez-Puente** (University of Oviedo) gave the second plenary speech at the symposium. It was titled “Register as a Predictor for the Use of Phrasal Verbs: A Diachronic Approach”. Phrasal verbs (e.g., *fade away*, *give up*) tend to be associated with spoken language and colloquial registers. This view was challenged by Thim (2012), who argued that the use of these verbs was motivated by the text's subject matter. Aiming at verifying his hypothesis, Paula Rodríguez-Puente investigated a larger set of data (*A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560–1760*, with 1.2-million-words of speech-related text types; and *A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers 3.1*). She came to the conclusion that register is the main predictor for phrasal verb usage in Early and Late Modern English but that other factors such as changes in style or in genre conventions must also be taken into consideration.

The plenary talk was followed by another corpus-based study of phrasal verbs: **Tara Struik** in collaboration with **Carola Trips** (University of Mannheim) spoke about “Determining the Impact of Verbs Copied from Old French: Towards a Quantitative Analysis of Verbal Prefixes and Verb Particle Combinations in Middle English and Early Modern English”. Their research is part of the DFG-project SILPAC (“Structuring the Input in Language Processing, Acquisition and Change”), a lexicon- and corpus-based approach investigating prefix and particle combinations in Middle English and Early Modern English

verbs. This approach seeks to systematically map out the diachronic development of phrasal verbs and detect possible changes in Middle English due to language contact (particularly with French). A preliminary result of their investigation is that French loan verbs and particles did not cause the loss of Germanic prefixes but contributed to the productivity of prefixation. Overall, verbs copied from French seem to have had no decisive impact on the English grammatical system.

Another contribution on Middle and Early Modern English verbs was made by **Michael Bilynsky** (Lviv/Lemberg University): “Hybridity in Middle English: The Case of De-Verbal Families”. He studied how inherited bases and suffixes (from Germanic) mix up with borrowed ones (from Latin and French) in Middle English – so-called ‘hybrid formations’ like PDE *know-able* from OE *cnāwan* + OF *-able* (from Lat. *-ābilis*). Presenting examples from his own database, he raised the question of how to distinguish same-root homogeneous derivatives. The material he investigated were, for example, *-ing* and *-er* de-verbal coinages. According to Michael Bilynsky, hybridity is verifiable by textual evidence and recordable in the lexicography of both word families and historical synonyms.

Next was **Julia Landmann** (University of Basel) with her paper on “Word-Formations Coined from French, Spanish, German, and Yiddish Borrowings in Late Modern English”. She presented an approach to lexical borrowing which combined sociolinguistics with cognitive linguistics (cf. Schmid 2018) to explain word-formations – nominal compounds, affixations, conversions, clippings, and blends – based on loans. Her material comprised c. 1250 types – the most frequently used loans in Present-Day English retrieved from the *OED*, *OALD*, and *LDOCE*. Julia Landmann investigated the morphological variability of these words in Late Modern English. Also, she looked into the potential loss of semantic connection between the constituents of a given derivative of a borrowing as well as into metonymic or metaphorical processes which led to the creation of a new concept (i.e., the loss of the relation between the constituents). Cognitive aspects relevant to the analysis of the word-formations coined from the various borrowings were also discussed.

The three following papers concentrated on medical and scientific vocabulary. The first was delivered by **Marta Sylwanowicz** (University of Warsaw) and entitled “*Bug doc, medico, piss-prophet, knife happy, waterologer, or 007: Different Ways of Naming Medical Doc-*

tors in English”. She examined names and expressions used to refer to medical practitioners in the history of English (from the Middle Ages to today) and drew special attention to non-standard or less formal expressions. She could show that there is evidence of an increasingly critical and negative attitude towards doctors, as many formations include elements of negative sense (e.g., formations with *urine* or *piss*). Marta Sylwanowicz furthermore demonstrated that there is a wide range of word-formation processes involved in the terms for doctors and related professionals. Overall, the data show a trend towards multi-word-units, reduplications, and shortenings.

The two remaining talks focussed on the Royal Society of London’s *Philosophical Transactions* which were established in 1665 and which are now “the world’s first and longest running scientific journal” (<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/rstl/about>). First, **Katrin Menzel** (Saarland University) spoke about “Initialisms in Late Modern English Scientific Writing”. Her analysis of initialisms in scientific journal articles from 1700–1920 in the *Royal Society Corpus* showed that initialisms for scientific concepts were used only occasionally in this period, referring to persons (honorifics, degrees, members of a society like *F.R.S.* for ‘Fellow of the Royal Society’) or to institutions (e.g., *R.A.S.* for ‘Royal Astronomical Society’). The growing number of shortenings and abbreviations over time can also be seen as a response to the needs of a specialised community of readers. Second, **Magdalena Bator**’s (WSB University in Poznan) paper on “Structural Analysis of Scientific Neologisms – the Case of *Philosophical Transactions*” provided an analysis of the scientific vocabulary first attested in the *Philosophical Transactions* and the different word-formational patterns involved in its creation. Magdalena Bator presented an analysis of the structure (morphology and word-formation), etymology (native or foreign elements), semantics, and survival of the scientific words.

All in all, the Munich symposium stressed the necessity and relevance to engage in historical English word-formation. It showed how diverse this sub-field of English diachronic linguistics has become. Many of the papers also demonstrated how fruitful and crucial it is to integrate findings from corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics as well as from neighbouring disciplines like translation and literary studies.

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