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Introduction

The meanings of deverbal nouns have been classified by various linguists in terms of case, such as agent or instrument of action. However, there has been little detailed work, either historically or synchronically, on the semantics of suffixes such as *-ment*, *-ation* and *-ance* which form such nouns. There is in fact much debate as to whether an affix can be said to have meaning at all.

Nevertheless, some general semantic distinctions have been found between the usages of rival but related English suffixes such as de-adjectival *-ness* and *-ity* (Riddle 1885), the adjective-forming suffixes *-ish* and *-y* ('Why apish and wormy?', Malkiel 1977) and the verbal suffixes *-ate*, *-ize* and *-ify* (Plag 1999). I am investigating the possibility of comparable distinctions between five English latinate nominal suffixes.

This book is a study of *-ment*, *-ance/-ence*, *-ation*, *-age* and *-al*, which entered Middle English (ME) via borrowings from French, and which now form abstract nouns in English by attaching themselves mainly to verbs. I shall argue that from their earliest appearance in English these suffixes began to select characteristically from a nexus of common meanings, in terms both of the kinds of bases to which each suffix was characteristically attached, and also of the kinds of contexts in which words formed in it tended to appear. It can be argued firstly that these choices show biases in suffixes towards certain areas of real-world semantics, such as abstract or concrete, moral or practical. Secondly, it seems to me that any deverbal noun may specialise in a distinct aspect of the central meaning 'action', such as specific instance or quality. These aspects have been touched on by Marchand (1969), but not considered systematically. Thirdly, such tendencies may be subject to change over time.

My method has been to examine the integration into English of each suffix, then to take samples of approximately 200 words in each, in order to determine the semantic categories in which they were used in their

earliest recorded citations in the *MED* and *OED*. Some of these contexts are analysed in detail. These findings are then compared with those from an examination of the same suffixes in ten plays by Shakespeare. By comparing the earlier semantic profiles for ME words with those for the same words in Shakespeare, as well as with those for words of later origin in the same suffixes, I attempt to predict some ways in which suffix use might develop over time, in the selection of both bases and semantic contexts.

The sample is not quite equally divided between suffixes. The *MED* lists total entries of 354 words ending in *-ment*, 282 for *-ance/-ence*, 599 for *-ation*, 251 for *-age*, and 524 for *-al* (including *-aille*). Not all the *MED* entries for each ending are of the same grammatical category, and many are spelling variants of the same word. I originally aimed at an approximate representative figure of 210 nouns per suffix, but for *-age* and *-al* respectively I found only 176 and 154 usable entries. The total number of words in the ME sample is just over 960.

The sample was taken in the first instance from my own selection of ME texts, chosen to represent in approximately equal volume three periods of ME: 1150–1300, the fourteenth century and the fifteenth century.[1] It soon became clear that this sample needed broadening. In addition, I wanted to construct a semantic profile for each suffix from the earliest known occurrence of each word in my database. I therefore turned to the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*), which provides dates for first attributions across many more texts than the fifty-five of the *Helsinki Corpus*.[2] The 438 from

1 The texts for the early period were selections from *Ancrene Riwle* (Hall 1920) and from a variety of prose texts in Bennett and Smithers (1966); for the fourteenth century Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* (Benson 1987), Gower's *Confessio Amantis* Books 1–4 (Weinberg 1983) and selections from Sisam (1959); for the fifteenth century, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* Book VIII (Spisak 1983) and selections from the *Paston Letters* (Davis 1983), the *Book of Margery Kempe* and the works of Julian of Norwich (Barratt 1992).

2 Dalton-Puffer's study (1996) uses the *Penn-Helsinki Corpus of Middle English* as a database for all French affixes in ME. This corpus includes a wide range of text types, but seems to have limitations as a source of suffixed words: for example, Dalton-Puffer found in it only two examples of the suffix *-aille* (precursor of *-al*). The corpus includes only 55 text samples and was designed chiefly for research into historical

which I have quoted include *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Peterborough Chronicle*, the *Kentish Sermons*, the *Katherine Group*, the *Gloucester Chronicle* and many romances from the early period; Mannyng, Rolle, Wyclif and many saints' lives, the *Rolls of Parliament*, guild documents, Mandeville, romances, the *Gawain* poet and much of Chaucer and Gower from the fourteenth century; and from the fifteenth century Hoccleve, Lydgate, the *Rolls of Parliament*, *Proclamations of the Privy Council*, many other administrative and court documents, Chauliac's medical treatise *Chirurgia Magna* and other practical and scientific treatises such as Palladius on gardening, as well as Trevisa and Caxton.

All items, together with forms on the same stem, have been dated from the *MED*, except those which appear only in the *OED*. This includes words taken from my own initial selection of texts: as only first attributions are given, quotations are from the *MED* or *OED* where these pre-date the texts. Where the *MED* gives different dates for a MS and its original text, I have also given both dates, that for the MS appearing first. The origin of words has been checked in the dictionaries of Anglo-Norman, Old French and Medieval Latin which appear in the bibliography. References for dictionary citations can be checked in the Plan and Bibliography of the *MED* and the Introduction to the *OED*.

Following the example of Biber and Finegan (1987), I have differentiated text types broadly according to subject matter rather than genre such as play, poem or letter. However, categories such as 'popular lore' and 'fiction' are in fact characterised as 'genre' in Biber and Finegan (1987: 25), and I have used this term in a similar sense. Stubbs refers to 'text type' and 'genre' interchangeably, remarking that 'The concept of text type is clear enough in general, but although many categorizations have been proposed, none is comprehensive or generally accepted ... There is no implication that such genres are categories with neatly defined boundaries, although the focal

syntax. Miller is critical of the exclusive reliance on corpora, which he claims in Dalton-Puffer's case has led to a 'misguided' denial of the productivity of French abstract suffixes even though she appears to be aware of counter-examples outside the corpus (Miller 1997: 252). There seems room therefore for a different kind of sample.

members of genres are usually easy to identify' (1996: 12). Classifications for ME texts are even less clear-cut and necessarily fewer than those appropriate for modern English. I have divided them into 'fictional', 'religious', 'administrative' and 'learned', as well as a broad 'general' category including history and topical commentary, usually but not always in prose. Not all verse is fictional in ME, and within the 'religious' category, for example, I have not made distinctions between religious verse, saints' lives, the Bible and spiritual handbooks.

Constraints of time and space forbade a comparison of my ME sample with a similarly wide and varied sample from a later date. Nunnally has in any case claimed that heterogenous data (such as mine for ME) can lead to misleadingly homogenised results, since 'the facts of variation are blended into standardized numbers' (1991: 26). He believes that 'general conclusions must be enriched by differently conceived, more narrowly confined studies' (1991: 34), which in his view 'present a less distorted picture' (1991: 31). I decided for all these reasons to compare my ME sample with a later cross-section of work by a single author, though possibly the most versatile and varied writer of the period following the Middle Ages, Shakespeare. The plays by Shakespeare are *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus*, *Othello*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, *Henry IV 1* and *Henry V*, chosen partly for their high incidence of neologisms in the suffixes under consideration, and partly as being representative of a range of dramatic genres. In addition the choice of Shakespeare makes possible a comparison between ME usage of earlier lexis across a range of genres and texts, and the highly conscious use of the same and similar lexis by a literary artist.

My indebtedness to Marchand, Kastovsky (1985) and Dalton-Puffer (1992, 1993, 1996) will be obvious throughout. However, none of these demonstrates semantic conclusions by detailed contextual analysis; indeed I know of no study of ME suffixes which does so apart from Riddle (1985), whose contextual examples are all from the use of *-ness* and *-ity* in modern English. Marchand and Kastovsky, like Riddle, discuss the semantics of deverbal suffixes from the starting point of modE, as does Malkiel on *-ish* and *-y* (1977); while Malkiel on *-al* (1944) and Merk on *-ance*, *-tion*, *-age* and *-ment* (1970) have treated the medieval suffixes only in Old French.

Dalton-Puffer (1994) quotes some contexts from Shakespeare in her paper comparing Shakespeare's agent nouns to Chaucer's, but she does not quote from Chaucer, and I have not found contextual examples elsewhere in her work on suffixes in ME. Furthermore, among the many useful studies of Shakespeare's language (e.g. Brook 1976, Hussey 1982, Blake 1983) I have seen only two examples of contextual analysis comparing the use of these latinate suffixes in the plays. These are in Salmon (1987) and Nevalainen (2001), both in short sections of articles dealing with Shakespeare's word formation and neologisms in general.

In her study in the field of Middle English affixation, *The French Influence on Middle English Morphology* (1996), Dalton-Puffer remarks in the concluding pages that her account needs expanding 'not only in breadth but also in depth ... digging deeper into the ... stylistic distribution of the phenomena under discussion' (1996: 228). I have tried to make a start on this, in depth rather than breadth. One further limitation of my study will be obvious: I have omitted any detailed consideration of the native suffixes which the Romance suffixes compete with or replace. This aspect has been dealt with extensively in the works cited by Marchand, Kastovsky, Riddle and Dalton-Puffer.

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CHAPTER 1

Productivity and Semantics

In this study, then, I shall be considering the five latinate deverbal nominal suffixes *ment*, *-ence/-ance*, *-ation*, *-age* and *-al*, in Middle English and in a restricted sample from Shakespeare, with a view to tracing their productivity and perhaps establishing more precise semantic distinctions than those so far available. I shall examine the contexts of their earliest recorded citations, discussing my ME sample chronologically across three periods: 1150–1300, the fourteenth century and the fifteenth century.

1.1. Productivity

Aronoff (1976), Booij (1986) and Plag (1999) have all commented on the relation between productivity and semantics. Before turning to the question of semantics, and in particular the semantics of derived words, I will briefly discuss some of the methods of identifying and assessing productivity.

1.1.1. Determining factors

Psycholinguistic tests have shown that frequency plays some part in determining productivity. The most productive forms appear to be those with high type but low token frequency, that is those with many class members, infrequently used (see Bybee 1985: 134). Words of a high token frequency have greater lexical strength: that is, they 'undergo less analysis, are less dependent on their related base forms than those with lower token

frequencies' (1985: 119). The degree of type frequency necessary for productivity is of course difficult to determine. Dalton-Puffer suggests that a 'critical mass' may operate for major derivational categories (1996: 224–5).

For Dalton-Puffer, the measure of productivity in Romance suffixes would be the appearance of hybrid forms with English bases (such as ONEMENT) which could only arise in her view from a necessary degree of 'naturalness', that is of morphosemantic and morphotactic 'transparency' in possible derivatives (Dalton-Puffer 1992). This follows Dressler's theory of Natural Morphology, in which an affix is attached to a base which remains unchanged (as in excite+ment > *excitement*), while the lowest is represented by suppletion (as in child > *children*) (Dressler 1985: 97–112). By these criteria she doubts whether most Romance suffixes became productive at all. 'Of the Romance suffixes only the transparent *-ment* has formed a marginal number of hybrids' (1992: 477). Miller, however, lists many more hybrids from the late fourteenth century in *-ment* and *-age* than are available in Dalton-Puffer's database, the Helsinki Corpus (1997: 243–5), pointing out that 'This implies that some French affixes were already developing productively in ME' (1997: 253). Dalton-Puffer herself admits that transparency should in the case of *-ment* have produced a higher score, since the highest degree of transparency available to a derivative is that of an affix added directly to a base without modification of the stem, as with consonant-initial suffixes (for example, *excite* > excite+ment rather than *conclude* > conclus+ion). However, she admits elsewhere that 'There are ... several things that naturalness alone cannot explain or which even contradict it ... the semantic level also plays an important role and may counterbalance the naturalness position of a given suffix' (1996: 215). Bybee has also pointed out that the perceived 'naturalness' of transparency is not in fact borne out by natural languages, in which suppletion and allomorphy, placed by Dressler at the bottom of the naturalness scale (Dressler 1985: 98–9), are more common than regularity (Bybee 1985: 208).

Dalton-Puffer quotes Bauer's suggestion of 'generalisedness' (a combination of frequency and analysability) as an indication of productivity (Bauer 1998: 61, quoted in Dalton-Puffer 1993: 185, 1996: 216), but concludes that there is no single principle behind the productivity of French

forms in ME (1996: 221ff). Kastovsky (1985) has pointed out that in the case of corpus languages such as ME, accessible only from texts, the establishment of synchronic productivity is 'somewhat problematic, since the major criteria for the establishment of productivity, viz., introspection, elicitation and acceptability judgements of neologisms, are not available' (1985: 228). I share his preference for discussing corpus languages in terms of 'analysability': that is, a situation in which paradigms appear and it becomes possible for contemporary users to distinguish base from affix.

1.1.2. Analysability

The conditions for 'analysability', though, are rather fluid in definition. To Dalton-Puffer, analysability of a derivative can mean the mere existence of related simplex forms, however much later they appear (1992: 476–7; 1996: 99). Zbierska-Sawala takes the same view, defining analysability as 'the co-occurrence of wholesale borrowings with simplex forms on the same stem or with other derivatives on the same stem' (1989: 93–4). The later borrowing of simplex forms would of course render a complex noun analysable or rather 'transparent' in retrospect, but would in theory rule out derivation from the later form.

In assessing analysability I have therefore adopted the view of Pattison (1975), who makes a distinction between words which appear before any related simplex form is recorded in the language (e.g. ME COMMANDEMENT) and those which follow an earlier simplex form (e.g. ME AVAUNCEMENT, the first attestation of which follows that for a verb *avancen*). In the first case the noun might be assumed to have been borrowed holistically, without analysis, while in the second case it is 'analysable' and could have been formed independently on the earlier verb. Pattison takes the view that a notable increase in such analysability may be seen as a sign of productivity, so that by dating and counting pairs on the same stem in a given affix, we may arrive at an estimate of when the affix became productive (1975: 159, 210). Dalton-Puffer also in fact recognises this distinction, pointing out that by the end of the ME period in her sample 'we can say that all derivatives which look analysable really are analysable'