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THE RULES OF WORD FORMATION AND THE DIACHRONIC DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTS

The present paper constitutes an attempt to reformulate the scope of morphological investigations concerning the historical development of word formation patterns. The observations I make concern language in general, though here I mostly make reference to English. Diachronic morphological investigations often concentrate on complex historical processes contributing to formal and/or functional evolution of a specific morphological category or categories. There is no denying that such a perspective on historical changes in the morphological inventory of a language is well justified since it helps us determine the extent to which diachronic studies influence the way we conceive of the synchronic regularities and irregularities of the language. Nonetheless, here an alternative approach is proposed, whose main idea is that the perspective on the diachronic studies of word formation be changed in accordance with the following intriguing regularity concerning the historical development of English word formation patterns:

(1) 'No concept realised formally by means of one word formation rule at one stage of the development of English is realised by means of the same rule at all the stages'[1].

The above hypothesis introduces the perspective on diachronic morphological investigations, which in several respects differs from the one mentioned at the beginning of the paper. The novelty of my approach lies, first of all, in the fact that it observes the changes of form as subjected to the changes of function: the underlying idea of this study is that concepts

[1] The formulation of the hypothesis as seen above need not be that categorical, but at the present stage the author refrains from arguing whether the regularity specified in the hypothesis will indeed cover all lexical items that at one time or other were coined by means of word formation rules.

take on various formal expressions over the period of their existence in the language. This is why I make use of a specific methodology which looks into the history of specific lexical items affected by sequences of formal changes.

However, the most important difference introduced by my approach to the study of the development of word formation rules in English is the assumption that in historical perspective these rules operate diachronically in sequences, one type substituting another in the course of time. In (2) I propose a hypothesis expressing this claim:

(2) 'Diachronic changes in the formal realisation of lexical items (concepts) in English are subject to the following ordering:
WORD→COMPOUNDING→AFFIXATION→LEXICALISATION'

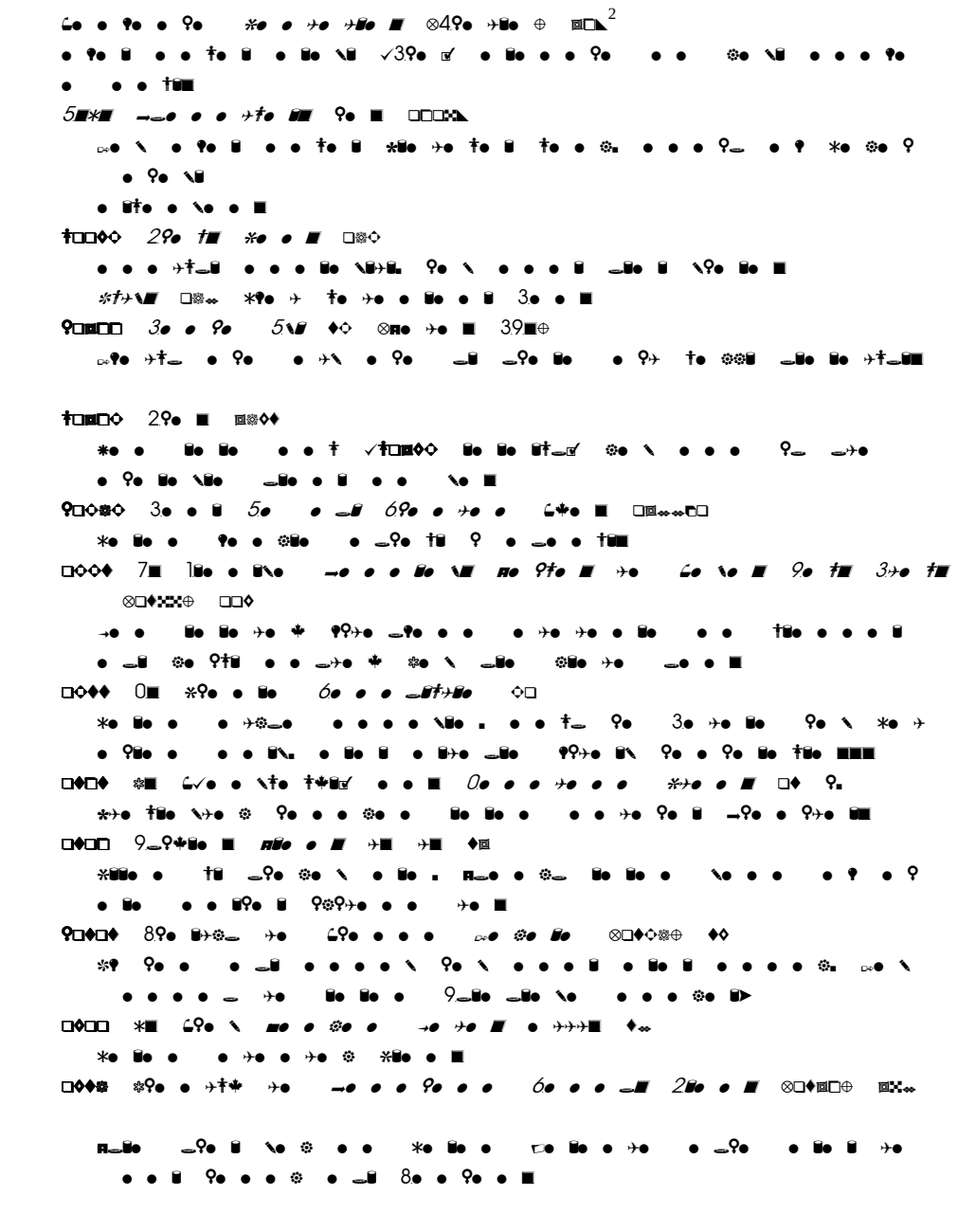
In this way I define a new area of interest to morphological historical studies. Apart from the research on the development of/within the derivational categories such as compounds or affixed words, the study of the diachronic relations that occur between the words and rules responsible for their creation is also worthwhile. My claim is that it is possible to determine the nature of these relations by observing the historical regularities of morphological change.

Before I go on to discuss further consequences of my approach and the model of diachronic rule sequencing I propose, I would like to illustrate the claims I have put forward so far by discussing three cases of morphological development in English.

1. The history of *'everyone'*

'Everyone' is the first example of historical development of a lexeme that I want to use as evidence for my claim. The word is considered a lexicalised item now, or to be precise a grammaticalised item, however it remains analysable as a compound of '*every*' and *'one'*. Though it seems no other clear-cut formal division within the word is possible, the study of the history of the word '*every*' shows that at some point it also was a compound. The OED traces the history of '*every*' even further back to the OE forms of ● ● ● ǽ, ● ● ǽ which again were themselves compounds of the preposition ● , synonymous with ● ● ǽ. The phonological change of the first vowel weakened the semantic identity of the word. This is why the form ● ● ǽ was placed before ● ● ● ǽ, thus giving rise to the form ● ● ǽ ● ● ● ǽ which, according to the OED, became interpreted as a

compound already in the tenth century. The OED illustrates the history of '*every*' with the following examples:



[2] All examples from the OED. All abbreviations after the OED.

As it may be observed from the above list of examples, the form *'efri'* occurred once about 1175, but it was not up until the sixteenth century that it became substituted with '*every*' (often spelled *'euery')*. Needless to say, the lexicalisation of the compound must have been the necessary prerequisite for the loss of the final *'ch'*.

The next stage in the history of *'everyone'* was of course the combination of '*every*' with *'one'*. The lack of space does not allow me to discuss this process in detail. I will only confine myself to mentioning the most important points in the historical development of English *'one'*: the fact that *'one'* began denoting personal reference opened the way to its combination with '*every*' and then to the grammaticalisation of the compound *'everyone'*[3]. It is interesting to observe that '*every*' – or actually – entered the combinations with *'one'* as early as the thirteenth century, so it seems the compound was open to further modification (such as into *'everyone'* or *'everywhere'*) even before the independent form of '*every*' came into being:

The form *'euery-choon'* (regular in the 16th and 17th centuries) is the marker of the on-going process of lexicalisation of *'everyone'*. This is because the formal division into the original components of the compound lost its importance in terms of grammar: the concept of *'everyone'* was then associated with the whole phonetic string, regardless of any internal divisions.

Let me repeat the stages through which the word *'everyone'* has gone in its development so far: the OE prepositional entered the compound of  . After the lexicalisation of the word, phonological changes occurred, which caused

[3] For further discussion on grammaticalisation in general and the grammaticalisation of the compound pronouns see e.g.: Raumolin-Brunberg (1994) and Rissanen, *et al.* (1997).

that the word started losing its semantic force, hence the synonymous element ● ● ●● ■ was placed before ● ● ● ≠, and as such this pair became a compound. As the examples above suggest, the final compound (*'everyone'*) consisted originally of the three elements, sometimes spelled separately. In the OED the form *'every one'* first occurs in the examples from the late 17th century.

2. The history of the adverbial ending *-ly*

The OED traces the history of the adverbial ending *-ly* back to the Old Teutonic stage. It states that:

[…] the original Teutonic adjectives in ■● ● ●● ■ were compounds of the noun ■● ● ●● ● 'appearance, form, body'. Thus ■● ●● ● ● ● ●● ■ ('manly') means etymologically 'having the appearance or form of a man'; ●● ● ● ● ● ●● ■ ('goodly') 'having a good appearance or form', or 'having the appearance or form of what is good'. The primitive force of the suffix may therefore be rendered by 'having the appearance or form indicated by the first element of the word'; but while in the historical Teutonic languages it has remained capable of expressing this meaning, it has in all of them acquired a much wider application.

The OED makes it is clear that the adverb-forming ending *-ly* developed historically from an independent element ■● ● ●● ● which later on entered compounds with other words. The above passage from the OED captures a very important aspect of the item's history: the point at which the change of its status from the compound to the suffixed word comes into view. This observation will be very useful for the development of the model that I present below.

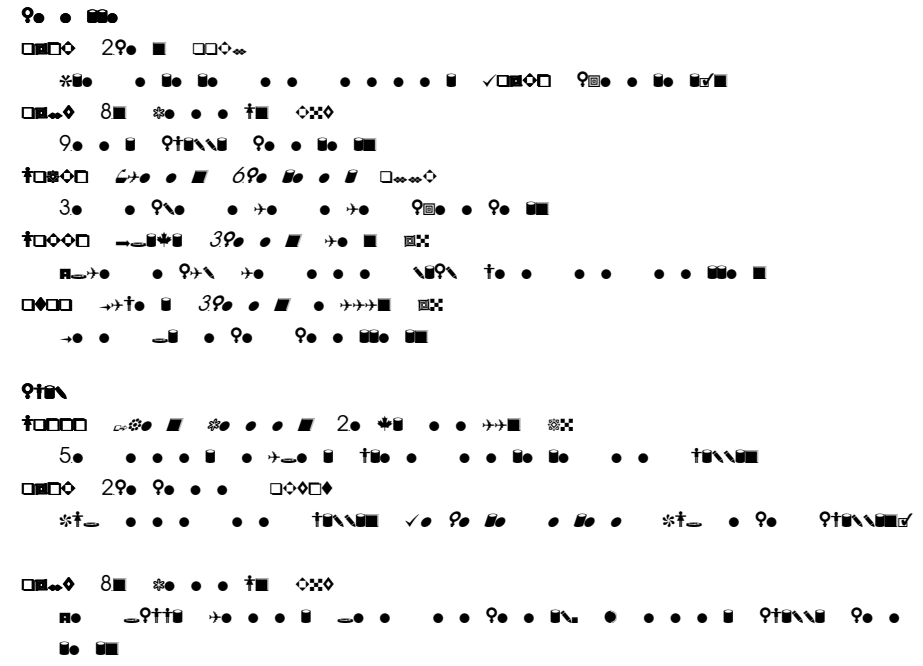
I would just like to conclude on the development of *-ly* by repeating the observations made in the OED: the Old Teutonic free form ■● ● ●● ● becomes a constituent of compounds, and in the course of time its function undergoes generalisation: it is no longer a component of a compound but a suffix.

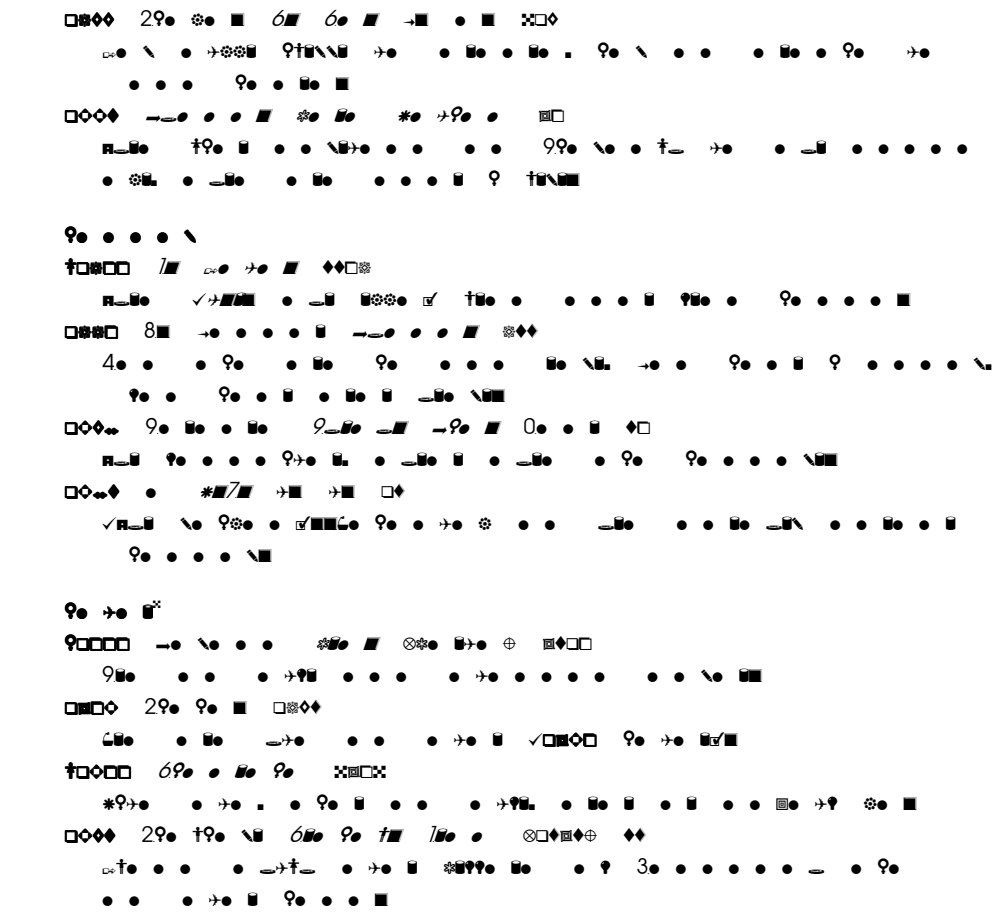
3. The history of the prefix *a-*

My last example of the historical development of English word-formation patterns is the prefix *a-*, which is found at the beginning of a wide selection of adverbs such as *asleep, around, abroad, aback, alive,* etc. The OED links the formation of these words with the existence and activity of the OE prepositional and adverbial function of *a*. The dictionary distinguishes among three prepositional functions of *a*, along with one adverbial, participial and others. The first prepositional function was connected strictly with that of *on*

and *in* and the element *a* was, according to the OED, a proclitic form of these prepositions added to other prepositions as in [illegible] . It was also to be found in few idiomatic verbal phrases such as *to go a begging, to set a going*, and finally most frequent with the above-mentioned adverbial formations such as *asleep, abed,* etc. The OE *a* performed an identical function with reference to the prepositions *of* (*akin, man a war*); *until* (in the combination with [illegible] as in *Lambert Homilies* 5: [illegible] us ha hine hereden a [illegible] e he rad in et [illegible] an est [illegible] ete); *off* (*a-down, a-thirst*).

The example of the English prefix *a-* shows how an independent lexical item began to function as a dependent morph. The question which I would like to ask here, and which is vital in the case of patterns such as the *a-* prefixation, is whether at some point of its development the combination of the preposition and some free word might be described as a compound. In other words, was it ever the case that the speakers considered words such as asleep, abed, around or alive compounds? It will be difficult to answer this question directly. Nonetheless, the history of these words illustrated by the examples in the OED reveals that all the above-mentioned *a-* prefixed forms seem to have functioned as Preposition+Word compounds before they finally turned into the *a-* prefixed items. In some cases the Preposition+Word combination was a contemporary alternative to the *a-* prefixation:





It has probably become obvious that the examples I have used above all confirm the validity of my assumption concerning the diachronic sequencing of the rules of word formation. In each case the direction of formal change was from simplex words through compounds to affixation – prefixation or suffixation.

Let me devote some more space to explain further the details of the model of diachronic rule ordering I propose. First and foremost, it must be stated that I do not assume that each and every word of English must be processed through each and every stage described above, i.e. to be subject to the process of compounding and then affixation, before being lexicalised. Neither do I want to

[4] The OED points to the apparent rivalry between the Preposition+Word and Prefixed Word forms of 'alive', which started about the 16th century. Until that time the separate spelling prevailed.

say that once a word is formed by means of affixation it will never be capable of functioning as an input for compounding or another type of affixation. The fundamental idea of the model is that it is difficult to find examples of any reverse type of rule sequencing in the history of English. Thus, it seems hardly possible to find historical evidence for an affixed word becoming a compound, an affix – a free morph, or a lexicalised compound to become compositional anew.

Before I describe in detail the sequencing of the rules of word formation, I want to stress that it is crucial to distinguish between my historical model and the model of synchronic word formation. These two approaches represent two different perspectives and so they must be kept separate.

The hypothesis I presented in (2) above mentioned three basic stages of the diachronic rule sequencing. The first stage in the sequencing cycle must be the WORD. This stage comprises two kinds of words: simplex, which subsequently enter compounds or take affixes, and complex, which are subject to further derivation.

Words, either simplex or complex serve as bases for COMPOUNDS. It will be assumed here that most compounds in English comprise two elements, hence in this paper I only make reference to such compounds. Neglecting any claims concerning the internal structure of English compounds, I assume that they are just concatenated structures of WORD X plus WORD Y. The only important structural difference is between the compounds made up with two open-class elements (e.g. N+N), and those where the first element (WORD X) is a preposition.

This difference is responsible for the division that occurs at the subsequent stage of the model, i.e. the AFFIXED WORD. In my hypothesis an affixed word necessarily consists of the words *X* and *Y* which functioned as the elements of a compound at the previous stage. In the majority of cases, the second element undergoes the process of abstraction or generalisation, and its meaning changes from item-familiar to type-familiar[5]. Its function thus changes from an element of a compound to a suffix (no longer a free morph), attachable to some definable set of bases. In the same way, the group of prepositional compounds naturally gives rise to prefixed words. All this does not equal to the statement that each prefix or suffix of English must necessarily develop from the previous stage of compounding. My objective here is to help explain how most English Preposition+Word compounds developed into prefixed words, and how what was once an element of a compound became a suffix.

Though it may hardly be named a process of word formation, lexicalisation is a crucial point in the history of lexical items and a vital element of the model that I propose. It is important for my studies since it modifies the relation

[5] The distinction taken from Mays (1975).

between form and meaning in lexical items. I define lexicalisation as the process that results in such an interpretation of a concept that makes the speaker attribute this concept with an unambiguous and indivisible formal (phonological) expression. In other words, once a word becomes lexicalised, its meaning is no longer dependent on the internal structure the word reveals (e.g. borders between morphological constituents). It also loses all feasible alternative semantic interpretations of the same formal expression. Before lexicalisation takes place there is no way to determine why *'a telephone box'* means *'a telephone kiosk'* and not e.g. *'a box in which it is recommended to keep a telephone after use'*[6]. It is my strong belief that lexicalisation completes each and every derivational process. Nevertheless, lexicalised items may freely function as objects of further derivational modification. The easiest way to incorporate the above assumption within my model is to state that at each stage of their diachronic development, words become lexicalised and as such are listed in the lexicon. Then they either drop from the list, stay unchanged, or are subject to further modification.

The main objective of this paper was to introduce the model of the relations that occur diachronically among the rules of word formation. It was meant to show that these rules are strictly connected, and act in well-defined sequences over historical periods. Though I strove to provide historical evidence for the validity of the model, one of the most vital ideas it conveys is that the diachronic sequencing of rules is a currently active process. It also concerns the changes that are taking place right now. The strongest assumption of the model is that there is only one direction of change of the formal expression of lexical items: from simplex forms through compounds to affixed words. In this way my model depicts the ever-lasting struggle between the tendency towards the increasing complexity of formal expression on the one hand, and the tendency towards a univocal semantic reading on the other (lexicalisation, one-to-one relation between the form and the concept).

References

Bauer, L. (1983) *English Word Formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meys, W.J. (1975) *Compound adjectives in English and the Ideal Speaker-Listener*. Amsterdam: North Holland.

[6] This example is taken from Bauer (1983:48). In his use, the example illustrates the changes that take place at the stage called 'institutionalisation'. I do not argue against either Bauer's or any other conceptions of lexicalisation, however the perspective in which I approach diachronic development in word formation justifies making reference to only one term, i.e. 'lexicalisation'.

Raumolin-Brunberg, H. (1994) “The development of the compound pronouns in -body and -one in Early Modern English” [in:] Kastovsky, D. (ed.) 1994. *Studies in Early Modern English*. Topics in English Linguistics 13. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 301–324.

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