

WORD-FORMATION DESCRIPTION AND MORPHOLOGICAL STATUS OF INTENSIFIERS IN NORWEGIAN

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ABSTRACT. The author analyses the morphological status of some Norwegian prefixes and first-words of compounds which convey the semantic feature of intensification. The status is hard to establish due to the incessant process of transition of independent words into affixes. After discussing the complex nature of word-formation analysis the author puts forward a hypothesis that the primary concern of word-formation studies should be meaning.

0.1. In this paper an attempt is made to account for the word-formation structure of Norwegian intensifiers, though the paper is not intended to be an exhaustive description of all patterns of intensification in Norwegian. It has been restricted to accounting for one particular intensifying device, i.e. by means of a prefix or first-word of a compound. According to Emmy Sachs (1963), this intensifying method is typical of most Germanic languages but in the case of Norwegian it seems to be significantly frequent (there are at least 70 morphological intensifiers in Norwegian, to name some of them: *blikk-*, *bom-*, *brenn-*, *drypp-*, *gjennom-*, *ill-*, *inn-*, *kjempe-*, *knall-*, *lik-*, *stapp-*, *stein-*).

1.0. The analysis of word-formative means of intensification in Norwegian raises some difficulties as they have an indefinite morphological status, being either prefixes or first-words of compounds, sometimes even neither of these parts. Intensifiers convey the semantic feature of intensification¹, they are determining components in the binary structure of words which display a determinant/determinatum relation.² The theory of binarity of words was introduced to linguistics by Rozwadowski³ and its validity is not called in question. Nevertheless, the nature of the divisibility of

¹ *Intensification is defined as a high degree of attribute here, cf. Janus (1976), Wierzbicka (1971), Apresyan et al (1972).*

² Marchand (1960).

³ Rozwadowski (1904).

words raises some theoretical doubts. Words like Pol. *malina* (raspberry), *ojczym* (stepfather), Eng. *cranberry*, *perceive*, *receive*, Norw. *skredder* (tailor) might serve as examples. The words in question comprise either first segments of unique occurrence, being the base of coining (*mal-* in *malina*, *skredd-* in *skredder*), or isolated affixes (*-ym* in *ojczym*), isolated elements with no lexical meaning (*cran-* in *cranberry*) and finally elements with no morphemic status (*re-*, *per-*, *-ceive* in *receive*, *perceive*). The analyses cover a wide spectrum of linguistic approaches. The most formal, distributional analyses allow the segmentation of *receive* and *perceive*, while liberal ones tend to recognize a word as divisible if any of the segments recurs in at least one other word in the same meaning.⁴ In the approach presented by Vinokur⁵ the elements of unique occurrence like *mal-* in *malina* are denied morphemic status. From Smirnicky's⁶ point of view the divisibility of words lies in recurrence of the second segment. Aronoff⁷, discussing the examples of unique morphemes in English (e.g. *cran-*, *huckle-*), comes to the conclusion that morphemes are not the minimal meaningful elements of language. As he sees it, what is essential about a morpheme is not that it has meaning but rather that we are able to recognize it.

1.1. How can this profusion of solutions be accounted for? Two reasons should be mentioned here. Firstly, it is highly plausible that the nature of divisibility denotes different phenomena, depending on the type and level of analysis. Secondly, it seems that the importance of meaning has not been emphasized enough in the above-mentioned studies.

Theoretically, all the words exemplified above can be divided, provided the right type of analysis is applied.⁸ Thus, the segmentation of words in terms of Zabrocki's distinctive morphology⁹ differs from the segmentation of words on a morphological or word-formation level. The types and levels of analysis should not be confused.

On the other hand, it is generally agreed that morphemes should be treated as minimal meaningful units and many authors stick tritely to this definition, making no attempt to define precisely the nature of meaning and criteria of its selection. This matter seems to be of primary importance especially as regards word-formation. Without a clear-cut definition of the meaning of derivative morphemes, any word-formation analysis runs the risk of being far from exhaustive. Let us consider the following group of words: *brennvarm* 'piping hot', *brennfort* 'very fast', *brennsikker* 'absolutely positive'. They display a determinant/determinatum relation – the recurring element *brenn-* is the determinant. As other determining components, *brenn-* surely conveys a certain lexical meaning. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned words do not constitute a semantically uniform set, i.e. the lexical property of the element *brenn-* is not recurrent in the respective items. Thus *brenn-* in *brennvarm* differs from *brenn-* in *brennsikker*. It is not sufficient to state the divisibility of words, nor

⁴ Nida (1949).

⁵ Vinokur (1946).

⁶ Smirnicky (1948).

⁷ Aronoff (1976).

⁸ "A priori, any word can be split in two and each part given a meaning.", Aronoff 1976:14.

⁹ Zabrocki (1967, 1969).

to acknowledge the selected elements as meaningful; the crucial point is to define the meaning most accurately. Word-analysis comprises therefore three stages, of which the initial two are of an intermediate nature, whereas the final stage is, as I see it, the core of word-formation process.

1.2. Within the framework of word-formation, I consider the semantic analysis fundamental. *Kanonfull* 'dead-drunk', *bomsterk* 'very strong', *kjempebra* 'very good', *niglane* 'stare hard' undoubtedly reveal a different morphemic structure of determinant/determinatum, but they are strictly connected by the presence of the word-formation, semantic feature of intensification. The morphemic structure of determinant/determinatum should not be confused with the semantic relation between the components, because if it is so, one fails to distinguish method from result. The question of the morphological status of intensifiers gives evidence to the fact that it is indeed the semantic value which regulates their morphological value.

2.0. As stated above, word-formation analysis is of a complex nature, and the semantic phase constitutes its core. The complex nature of word-formation processes should also be viewed from a different angle. As Pennanen (1979:110) rightly points out "word-formation is an odd mixture of diachrony and synchrony". The patterns which can be observed synchronically are the result of diachronic processes. I would like to emphasize the continuous nature of diachronic processes. Languages reveal great creativeness in forming new lexical items, and new coinages may come into existence in no time at all. As regards intensifiers, the above statement is extremely important since some of them are prefixes, some are autosemantic lexemes, whereas others occupy an intermediate position and their morphological status is difficult to establish. As it can be observed, an incessant process of transition of free forms into bound ones (to use Bloomfield's terminology) has been taking place. To put it in a different way, independent words become affixes and thus exemplify perspicuously the influence of diachrony on the synchronic structure of language. In many cases the processes are rapid, so that the distinction between diachrony and synchrony becomes blurred. Therefore the morphological status of intensifiers is hard to establish.

2.1. A penetrating analysis of the process was carried out by Rozwadowski in his work "Wortbildung und Wortbedeutung" (1904). It was written in reply to Wundt's psychological theory of language and – though to a great extent imprecise and unclear – put forward a fundamental thesis, namely the binarity of linguistic formations. Rozwadowski applied the thesis, which was obviously correct, to different levels of language (including phonology). Thus he stated: "The so-called simple unit (simplex) combined with the so-called suffix is identical with the so-called compound as far as the pattern of coining is concerned. The difference between them is only relative, it rests in the history of their development" (Rozwadowski 1904:27, translation by this author). Rozwadowski distinguishes several stages of the process but the occurrence of all stages in the development of a word is not an essential condition. At first, there is a syntactic group which merges into a compound, then a suffixal derivative, and finally an indivisible lexical unit. Rozwadowski emphasizes the fact that even an apparently new unit is the result of aperception, which demonstrates the influence

diachrony exerts on synchrony. The stages are hard to delimit, they may coexist (e.g. *Trinkwasser* and *Wasser zum Trinken*) or display different levels of development.

2.2. The dynamic nature of word-formation also underlies Marchand's notion of a "semi-suffix". In his basic work on English word-formation¹⁰, Marchand discusses the problem rather superficially but it can be clearly seen from the definition that he is aware of the process under consideration: "*by this term I understand such elements as stand midway between full words and suffixes. Some of them are used only as second-words of compounds, though their word character is still clearly recognizable*" (Marchand 1960:290). The intermediate nature of semi-suffixes is indirectly supported by Marchand's definition of prefixes: "*such particles as can be prefixed to full words but are themselves not words with an independent status*" (Marchand 1960:85). Later on he adds: "*Native prefixes have developed out of independent words*". It appears from his statement that Marchand accepts the process of transition of independent words into affixes, though he does not express it explicitly. Marchand's concept should be given a more precise shape, particularly as regards unclear and vague terms like "*words with an independent existence*". Independent existence is not entirely of a formal character but also – or perhaps first of all – of a semantic one. Thus the element *rå* 'raw' in *råstekt* 'raw – of meat' has an independent formal and semantic status but *rå* in *råkjekk* 'very fine, swell' has no independent formal status and its semantic status is abstract compared with its homonymous counterpart.

The notion of semi-suffixes has also been demonstrated by other authors. Terms like "Halbsuffix", "relatives Suffix", "Affixoid" and "Halbableiter" are used to denote nearly the same phenomenon.

3.0. The nature of word-formation studies seems to have been misinterpreted. Morphological investigation of form is undoubtedly of taxonomic value, but it does not cover all the word-formative processes. Word-formation should be based on content. It becomes then a set of methods which produce new lexical units in order to either convey or combine new meanings irrespective of morphological realisation.

3.1. Regarding meaning as the core of word-formation studies, one may view the phenomenon of transition of independent words into affixes from a different angle: as a multistage process in the course of which a semantic change takes place. The following stages of the process are suggested:

STAGE I – The prospective prefix preserves its meaning.

STAGE II – Two variants possible:

- The prospective prefix loses its meaning.
- The prospective prefix modifies its meaning.

STAGE III – Two variants possible:

- A new prefix is formed.
- The co-occurrence of a lexical unit and a prefix developed out of it in different semantic types is possible.

Different stages of the process can be recognized as co-existing within a single item.

¹⁰ Marchand (1960).

This complex matter may be convincingly exemplified by the element BRENN-. Three groups with BRENN- can be distinguished.

In the first group BRENN- conveys its original sense and is therefore tacked on to words denoting 'warmth/heat' and, on the basis of semantic association, also 'cold'. Examples are *brennvarm*, *brennhe(i)t*, *brennkald* and deadjectival nouns respectively. In the second group, the original meaning of BRENN- is still present, though strongly reduced. Examples here are words denoting colour (*brennrød*) and haste (*brennfort*, *brennkvik*). In the third group the original meaning of BRENN- is no longer preserved. Thus, BRENN- becomes here a prefix which solely conveys the semantic feature of intensification (*brennaktuell*, *brennsikker*, *brennstærk*).

From the semantic point of view, one can recognize the co-existence of three homophonous morphemes:

BRENN₁ - lexical (*brennvarm*)

BRENN₂ - (*brennfort*)

BRENN₃ - (*brennsikker*)

BRENN- presents a splendid exemplification of the process of developing affixes out of independent words. One should bear in mind that intensifiers are constantly subject to these processes. I would like to put forward a hypothesis that the semantic factor is of primary importance in these processes. It seems highly plausible that there is a potential "readiness" in Norwegian - and undoubtedly some other languages - to intensify an attribute. Each language has its own methods of lexical innovation, therefore it is due to the linguistic structure of Norwegian that the intensification of meaning is rendered on a morphological level. The language makes use of existing lexical units imposing an abstract semantic feature on them. Selection is performed on the basis of a "trial-and-error method" and only some of the items reach the level of a new abstract meaning.

To sum up: the primary concern of word-formation theory should be meaning and the means of conveying it. From the semantic point of view, the morphological difference between *driv-*, *dy-*, *dyng-* is insignificant as the elements tacked on to *-vat* 'wet' are assigned the same semantic feature. For word formative description, the question of morphological status is of secondary importance. Morphological status is recognized at the intermediate stage of the process described above.

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