Affixes and Combining Forms in English Dictionaries

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Background

- Word-forming elements have long been included as headwords in some dictionaries of English
- Information presented about words in dictionaries does not always coincide with the information presented about words in grammars
- Different dictionaries provide quite different analyses of affixes
- Dictionaries aimed at native speakers often appeal to regularity in word-formation to explain why certain words are not included in the dictionary

Yet another group [of words that must be excluded] is composed of many substantive uses of adjectives, adjective uses of substantives (as of nouns of material), participial adjectives, verbal nouns ending in –ing, abstract nouns ending in –ness, adverbs ending in –ly from adjectives, adjectives ending in –ish, regular compounds, etc., which can be used at will in accordance with the established principles of the language, but which are too obvious, both in meaning and formation, and often too occasional in use, to need separate definition.”

from the Preface to The Century Dictionary by William Dwight Whitney

Outline of talk

- Discuss briefly the view of word-formation in grammars
- Present data on word-forming elements from several dictionaries of English
- Identify tendencies and areas in which there is room for improvement in the representation of word-forming elements in dictionaries
- Comments on the relationship between dictionary representation and morphology in general

View(s) of English word-formation in grammars

- Rule-governed behavior
  - Bound forms and non-bound forms
  - Precisely identify characteristics of the input and the output
  - Involves affixation, compounding, and conversion
  - Neoclassical compounding
    - Neoclassical bound roots combine with other neoclassical bound roots
    - Derivation and compounding can occur in different parts of the grammar
  - Rules account for existing forms and, if productive, account for newly created forms

View(s) of English word-formation in grammars

- View of word-formation as a cline (Kastovsky 2009):
  “[...] it can be argued that compounding, affixation, clipping and blending should be regarded as prototypical patterns arranged on a scale of progressively less independent constituents ranging from word via stem, affixoids, affix, curtailed word/stem to splinters as constituents of blends, and finally acronyms (letter combinations), i.e.

(12) compounding (word) > stem compounding (stem) > affixoids > affixation proper (word-/stem-based) > clipping compounds (clipping of words/stems) > blending > splinters > acronyms.”
Classification of word-forming elements in grammatical description

- Affixes
- Bound roots
- Words
- Can create a new affix from an existing word

Szymanek (2005) terms this phenomenon 'affix secretion', defined as "a case where a new affix has established itself because speakers start to perceive it in a group of borrowed words or because speakers reinterpret a particular existing word (which can be native or foreign). [...] Initially, the use of such a newly established affix may be attributed to analogy."

Marchand, Hans (1960: 290)

- Semi-suffix
  elements "midway between full words and suffixes. Some are only used as second words of compounds, though their word character is still clearly recognizable."
  - -like
  - -worthy
  - -monger
  - -way, -ways
  - -wise

View(s) of English word-formation in dictionaries

- Many dictionaries include affixes and other word-forming elements as headwords
- Role of historical information is important in many synchronic dictionaries
- 'Combining form' terminology introduced by the OED
- Data discussed:
  - 16 word-forming elements in 8 dictionaries

Word-forming elements under consideration

Affixes
- -er, -ful, -ish, -ly

Neoclassical combining forms
  bio-, cardio-, eco-, ecto-, -ectomy, -logy, mini-

Compound-forming elements
  fore-, -less, -like, -ware, -wise

Dictionaries studied

- The Century Dictionary (1889-1891)
- Concise Oxford Dictionary (1911)
- American College Dictionary (1946)

Late 20th century – early 21st century
- Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (11th ed)
- Chambers Dictionary (10th ed)
- American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (5th ed)
- Oxford Dictionary of English (3rd ed)
- Macmillan English Dictionary (on-line)
### Brief comparison of dictionary data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dictionary</th>
<th>Combined forms included as headwords</th>
<th>Examples in dictionary data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHD5</td>
<td>-er, fore-, -ful, -ish, -less, -ly</td>
<td>eco-ectomy, fore-</td>
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<td>DE LINGÜÍSTICA APLICADA INSTITUT UNIVERSITARI</td>
<td>-er, fore-, -ful, -ish, -less, -ly</td>
<td>eco-ectomy, fore-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contemporary Dictionaries

- American Heritage Dictionary
  - All are headwords
  - Prefix, suffix
- Macmillan English Dictionary (learner’s)
  - Does not include: ecto-, -ectomy, -er, fore-, -ful, -logy
  - Prefix, suffix


-ful

1. (forming adjectives from nouns) full of: sorrowful
   - having the qualities of: masterful.
2. forming adjectives from adjectives or from Latin stems with little change of sense: grateful.
3. (forming adjectives from verbs) apt to; able to; accustomed to: forgetful | watchful.
4. (pl. -fuls) forming nouns denoting the amount needed to fill the specified container, holder, etc.: bucketful | handful.
- ORIGIN from full1.

Not such a good job American Heritage Dictionary

-ful suffix.
1. a. Full of: playful.
   b. Characterized by; resembling: masterful.
   c. Tending, given, or able to: useful.
2. A quantity that fills: armful.

ETYMOLOGY:
Middle English, from Old English, from full, see full1.

Dictionaries and word-forming elements

• Currently:
  - Increased presence of grammar in general language dictionaries
  - Increased power of dictionaries designed for digital consultation

• Should there be more information about the internal structure of words and other types of lexical units?
  - Word-forming elements have both semantic and grammatical information, and dictionaries do not represent most grammatical information well

Room for improvement

• Dictionaries need to indicate what an affix attaches to
  - Currently, only Oxford Dictionary of English does this systematically
• Dictionaries need to indicate the word class of the resulting form
  - Oxford Dictionary of English, Merriam-Webster do this systematically
• Dictionaries need to indicate something about current productivity
• Chambers has a quite different “nesting” policy

Concluding thoughts

Most modern grammars do not include “combining forms” as part of morphological analysis, although “combining forms” are found in several current dictionaries

Some dictionaries use a broad interpretation of prefix and suffix
Concluding thoughts

- Corpus lexicography
  - Will it have any effect on the way word-formation is represented in dictionaries?
- Influence of learner’s dictionaries and the “functional” approach to lexicography
  - Will fewer affixes be included in future general language dictionaries?
- Dictionaries designed for electronic consultation

Thank you for your attention

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Agrupación semántica y relaciones lexicológicas en el diccionario