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Word-Formation Types of the Old Germanic Abstract Nouns: Onomasiological and Cognitive Approach

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Abstract

The onomasiological and cognitive approach to word-formation is a method of linguistics that helps analyze how the conceptual level is specified by the WF component at the system level of language. The word-formation types of the Old Germanic abstract nouns understood as “derivational schemas” (Dirven, Verspoor, 1998), jointly represent a common schema or /and schemas of high level of abstraction. But taken separately, each word-formation type represents a semantic modification of the schema / schemas which is marked derivationally. It is argued that these are the derivational suffixes of abstract nouns that function as markers of some specific “shades” of meaning. A componential analysis of the suffixes’ reconstructed semantics results in a hypothesis of their primary semantic opposition.

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1. Introduction

A look at the current state of development of the word-formation theory in European and Russian linguistics shows that there is a strong shift towards the onomasiological approach which was inspired to a large extent by the evolving cognitive paradigm in science in general. Along with other objective reasons the importance of the onomasiological approach to WF can be accounted for by the fact that it enables researchers to unravel how conceptual categories like THING, ACTION, QUALITY, etc. operate in connection with the logico-semantic categories such as AGENT, INSTRUMENT, LOCATION, etc. Despite sharing some common features with

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Cognitive Grammar, the onomasiological theory of WF focuses on the word-formation rules that generate new naming units. In other words, it starts from the conceptual structure, proceeds to the semantic structure and then to the morphemic structure of a language unit (Štekauer, 2002). Thus, the onomasiological approach to an analysis of the WF types which serve as an object of study in the present paper can help reveal how the conceptual level is specified by the WF component at the system level of language. The aim of the present paper is to contribute to the development of the cognitive onomasiological approach to WF by presenting a view on what kinds of cognitive structures can be instantiated by WF types.

2. Materials and Method

The linguistic units analyzed in the present article are complex units of the WF component of a language system termed as “WF types”. However, the term “WF type” is used here not in P. Štekauer’s sense “onomasiological WF types” but rather as a synonym to K. Hansen’s *Wortbildungstyp* (= WF type) which is opposed to *Wortbildungsmodell* (= WF pattern) or to D. Tuggy’s notion of *schema* (Štekauer & Lieber, 2005). If we subscribe to the theory that a word is a symbolic label of mental categories, this label is morphologically structured in an iconic way which leads us to accept the idea that each naming unit instantiates a “derivational schema” (Dirven & Verspoor, 1998). Thus, the term “WF type” in this article refers to a derivational schema understood as a cognitive pattern according to which a number of words are produced. This pattern is a rough outline, a less-fully-specified version of a concept represented by actual language units because it is a structural model of high level of abstraction that retains only those features that are common to all of its instantiations, irrespective of any “shades” of their lexical meaning (Langacker, 1987; Evans & Green, 2006; Lampert, 2010). Viewed from this perspective, all WF types used to generate naming units of a certain semantic class (in our case – abstract nouns) jointly represent a common schema or /and schemas of high level of abstraction. That is why, each WF type should be regarded as a semantic modification of the schema / schemas and there is a derivational marker in each WF type that iconically “codes” some specific aspect of their meaning (Kubrjakova, 2004).

3. Results

The WF types under analysis here constitute a WF category used to generate naming units with an abstract meaning in three Old Germanic Languages: Gothic, Old High German and Old Icelandic. A complete selection of abstract nouns from the dictionaries in the three languages enabled us to single out all WF types of the old Germanic abstract nouns (Streitberg, 1910; Feist, 1920; Cleasby 1957; Vries, 1957; Lehmann, 1986; Schützeichel, 1989; Köbler, 1989; Köbler, 1993; Köbler, 2013). Some quantitative results of that selection are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Old Germanic abstract nouns and their WF types.

Languages	Gothic	OHG	OIcel
Data			
No of Abstract Nouns	592	2458	7674
Feminine nouns	434	1773	3708
Masculine nouns	59	383	1726
Neuter nouns	99	302	2240
No of WF types	26	31	42
Feminine nouns	16	15	23
Masculine nouns	7	9	10
Neuter nouns	3	7	9

A further analysis of the morphemic and derivational structure of the selected nouns showed that they are distributed into several structural patterns providing an example of the aforementioned WF types. These patterns demonstrate that the root morpheme can combine with a prefix, a suffix and an inflection. It is necessary to mention

here that the suffixes identified in the morphemic structure of the Old Germanic abstract nouns are of two types: suffixes per se and classifying (or stem-building) suffixes. Both types of suffixes function as derivational affixes for the Old Germanic AN.

In light of the hypothesis mentioned above, a search for a derivational marker that signals a semantic modification of the WF type directed our attention to the area of suffixation alone because it was long ago discovered that prefixes did not play a significant role in the production of the Old Germanic nouns (Gukhman, 1998; Gukhman et al., 1963).

A complete inventory of the suffixes found in the structure of the Old Germanic AN (see Table 2) was further analyzed in terms of their chronology, etymology and reconstructed semantics which made it possible to divide them all into four chronological layers as well as to trace their origins.

Table 2. Suffixes of the Old Germanic abstract nouns.

Gender	WF affix	Gothic	Oícel.	OHG
Feminine	Stem-building suffix	-ō-, -i-, -jō-, -ōn-, -ein-, -jōn-, -wō-, -wōn-	-ōn-, -jōn-, -īn-, -ō-, -i-	-ō-, -ī(n)-, -ōn-, -i-, jō-
	Suffix	-īpa-/ida- *ti- *ni- -eini-/aini-/ -ōni- -duþi- -ubni-/ufni- *þwō-	-semd/-semi -an-/un- -n (< -īni-/ēni-) *ni- -ing/-ning -ung -gi -ska/-zka -eskja- -sla/-zla /-sl -átta -osta/-usta/-asta -andi- -ð/-d/-t (< *iþō-, *ði-) -st-	-scaff(t)-, -heit-, -nissa-, -nessī-, -unga-, -ida/-eda-, -nussida-, -t-, -d-, -st- -unc-, -(i)gi-
Masculine	Stem-building suffix	-u-, -a-, -i-, -in-/an-, -ja-, -jin-	-an-, -a-, -i-	-a-, -an-, -ja-, -u-
	Suffix	*tu-, -oþu-/odu- -assu- -inassu-	-andi- -ingr- -skapr -dómr, -leikr/-leiki -aðr/-naðr -uðr/-nuðr -a-, -ia-, -i-	-tuom-, -ōd/-ōt-, -ing-, -unc-/anc-
Neuter	Stem-building suffix	-ja-, -a-, -in-/an-, -jin-	-a-, -ia-, -i-	-a-, -ja-, -an-
	Suffix	-ubni-/ufni- *þwa-	-læti/læti -andi- -sl- -an- -ing- -erni-	-tuom-, -nissi-/nessi-, -sal-, -ōd/-ōt-, -tar- -an-/en-

As the etymological data show, the suffixes of the Old Germanic AN are linked to the four periods in the history of these languages: 1) suffixes of Germanic origin (e.g. -assu-, -ing-); 2) suffixes of the indo-european origin (e.g. *-tu-, *-etā-); 3) “young” suffixes originating from the second elements of compounds (e.g. -tuom-, -skapr-); 4) stem-building suffixes of the most ancient period – early pre-indo-european (e.g. -ō-, -i-, -a-, -n-, -u-). It is possible to carry out a subsequent subdivision within each group of suffixes.

The linguistic data and conclusions of numerous studies of various indo-european and old Germanic suffixes contribute enormously to the reconstruction of their primary semantics (extensive bibliographies in Meinecke, 1994; Casaretto, 2000; Casaretto, 2004; Kotin, 2012; Krasukhin, 2004). Relying on these data, it was possible to identify, among other things, the etymological ancestry of the most ancient WF suffixes of AN, i.e. stem-building suffixes, and to trace the evolution of their syncretic semantics (Novitskaya 2012; Novitskaya 2013).

The upshot of all these research stages was a reconstruction to a justified extent of a cognitive /derivational schema, or schemas, that underlies all of the most productive WF types of AN.

In terms of their realized productivity (see Baayen, 2009 for the term) the WF types that came under analysis proved to be the following:

Gothic: 1) F ein (ein) 120*, 2) F i (eini, aini, ðni) 117, 3) F i (ti) 66, 4) N a (a) 47, 5) N ja (ja) 40, 6) F ð (iþa) 39, 7) F ð (ð, wð) 29, 8) F ðn (ðn, jðn) 21.

Old Icelandic: 1) N a (a) 1368, 2) M a/i (a/i) 707, 3) F i/ð (t, d, ð) 699, 4) N ia (ia) 696, 5) F ð (ing, ning, ung) 647, 6) F ðn (ðn) 581, 7) F i (un, an) 458.

Old High German: 1) F in (in) 610, 2) F i (t, d, st) 247, 3) F ð (ð) 233, 4) F ð (eda) 223, 5) F ð (unga) 191, 6) M a (a) 179.

(* F ein (ein) 120 – should be understood as 120 feminine nouns, declination type in -ein, WF suffix is -ein-.

The fact that a great deal of naming units are built according to these WF types, accompanied by the linguists' assessment of their productivity ranking (Gukhman et al., 1963; Meinecke, 1994; Casaretto, 2004), encouraged us to assume that these WF types may represent the derivational schema/schemas closest to the prototypical one/ones.

4. Conclusion

A step-by-step description of the reconstruction procedure is presented in detail in (Novitskaya, 2013 b). In summation, the results of the conducted analysis are as follows.

The first salient feature that came into view is that all WF types can be grouped according to whether the naming units are labels of an objectified action or quality (also known as Nomina actionis and Nomina qualitatis; Verbalabstrakta and Adjektivabstrakta) because the predominant number of Old Germanic abstract nouns are verbal or adjectival derivatives. This fact should lead to the conclusion that all naming units with abstract semantics are cognitively treated as THINGS.

Secondly, the focal point of opposition among the WF types is whether the THING is viewed as a quality or action commonly and typically allied with a specific bearer of such quality or doer of such action (= concrete, definite THING) or the THING is viewed independently, per se, in connection with NO bearer or doer (= absolute, indefinite THING). This type of opposition is exemplified by the following Table 3:

Table 3. Types of opposition

THING ^{absolute}	THING ^{concrete}
WFT «Verb. + s/b suff. -a-»	WFT «Adj., Verb + s/b suff. -ein-/-in-»
WFT «Verb + suff. *-ti-»	WFT «Verb, Adj. + suff. -eini-, -aini-, -ðni-»
WFT «Verb, Adj., Noun + s/b suff. -ja-»	WFT «Verb, Adj., Noun + s/b suff. -ðn-»
WFT «Adj., Verb + suff. *-iþð-»	WFT «Verb, Adj. + suff. -ing-/-ung-»
WFT «Verb, Adj. + s/b suff. -ð-»	

These distinctions are covertly marked by the Old Germanic WF suffixes of AN which confirms an opinion that every suffix is attributed to some kind of conceptual import and functions to single out some particular substructure within a certain conception (Langacker, 1987). This function of suffixes to signal a certain profile is based on their syncretic semantics rooted in the semantics of their etymological sources. It is a well-established fact that the ancient markers of the morphological types of nouns – stem-building suffixes – originate from the pronominal roots which in turn go back to the deictic elements (Brugmann, 1922; Meillet, 1938; Krasukhin, 2004; Shields, 2000). This fact can explain the third salient feature of the WF types under analysis: one can assume that the primary function of the

stem-building and simultaneously derivational suffixes was to act as distance markers. Unlike the idea of a THING being or not being associated with a certain bearer/doer which was conveyed implicitly, the underlying concept of distance was marked explicitly. Thus, the stem-building suffixes *-i- and *-n- operated as the markers of the greatest degree of closeness in relation to the speaker, the suffixes *-a- and *-ō- marked the least degree of closeness, the suffix -j- indicated that the degree of closeness is indefinite.

To sum up, the results of the conducted analysis indicate that the WF types of the Old Germanic AN instantiated a cognitive schema that can be defined as “a THING that names a QUALITY or ACTION identified by its derivational base either in or without relation to the bearer / doer”.

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