

Historical Support for Affixoids in German

Much synchronic work on German word-formation has taken a stance in rejecting the morphosyntactic category of affixoid. For those going against this scholarly trend, however, the affixoid refers to a unit of language (e.g., an erstwhile noun) most often identified in a stage of German developing out of a compound structure (e.g., noun + noun) and toward an element typically recognized as a derivational suffix. At the same time, a cardinal feature is that an etymologically related, unbound variant of the affixoid exists and has the same form. An example is the ongoing existence of the Modern German noun *Werk* 'work' and the second member of the construction *Laubwerk* 'foliage'. *Laub* in isolation bears the meaning 'leaves'. The semantics of the complex example have undergone a degree of generalization in comparison to the simplex, unbound item, and thus *(-)werk* seems to be on a trajectory mirroring the creation of a derivational suffix. Going back to scholarship rejecting this linguistic category, much of it rests on Schmidt's 1987 pronouncement of the affixoid's lack of value as a category, and/or upon Fleischer and Barz, whose reference work on German word-formation for the modern language is seen as the standard handbook on the topic (and Fleischer and Barz traditionally refer to Schmidt's work regarding affixoids). The problem is that the volume which published Schmidt's work was assembled in an ostensibly close-team effort, and generally claims that the contributors pay heed to classical word-formation of German work carried out in the 19th and early 20th centuries. A review of that earlier literature (e.g., von der Gabelenz, Grimm, Paul, Wilmanns) reveals an impressive amount of discussion on what are readily interpreted as affixoidal phenomena, which begs the question as to why the notion of affixoid is rejected by Schmidt and others. Evidence from the record points to a bias against historical approaches. Not only does the older scholarship address the topic of affixoids, but in certain respects it exceeds in quality what many scholars have heretofore understood as principles of affixoidhood, e.g., placing an emphasis on the linguistic context in which an element occurs (as well as related principles of grammaticalization). This presentation injects new vigor into the mainstream debate on the validity of the category affixoid by sharing the earlier ideas of Grimm, Paul, et al on the subject. In so doing, comments from the above literature also serve for further discussion on the perceived divide between historical / diachronic work versus modern work with a largely synchronic focus. In promoting both a diachronic and synchronic approach to the assessment of affixoids in German, we can assess more plentiful and more objective data about what affixoids are.

Works cited

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