

Word semantics in terms of suffix combinability: L2 acquisition and a specialized electronic corpus

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This paper discusses the semantics of complex words of the type BASE-SUFFIX1-SUFFIX2 with data from Polish (e.g., *pis-ar_N-ski_{ADJ}* ‘writer’s’) and suggests strategies for facilitation of L2 vocabulary learning and for creation and automatic annotation of a specialized corpus of word-formation.

The semantics of complex words is modeled through the combinability of the suffixes they contain with the help of the findings of the so-called cognitive approach (Manova 2011) that is usage-based and follows a distributional logic: SUFF1 suffixes followed by the same SUFF2 suffixes derive the same semantics, SUFF1 suffixes with different combinability derive different semantics. With data from a large dictionary (Saloni et al. 2007) and the National Corpus of Polish (Przepiórkowski et al. 2012), it will be demonstrated that SUFF1 and SUFF2 relate in specific ways and all their combinations are either fixed or predictable. Fixed combinations are those in which SUFF1 is always followed by only one SUFF2 of a major lexical category (noun, adjective, verb). In a predictable combination, SUFF1 is followed by more than one SUFF2 of a lexical category but either one of the SUFF2 suffixes dominates over the others, i.e. it derives a great number of types, whereas all other SUFF2 suffixes derive a very limited number of types; or different SUFF2 suffixes of the same lexical category derive different semantics, e.g. an object and an abstract noun. Intriguingly, only a few semantic concepts derive the various SUFF1-SUFF2 combinations in Polish word-formation. For example, for the derivation of complex nouns one has to consider only [+/-person], [+/-object], [+/-place], [+/-abstract]. Moreover, psycholinguistic research on the representation of suffix combinability in the mental lexicon provides evidence that native speakers of Polish know SUFF1-SUFF2 combinations without lexical bases by heart (Manova & Brzoza 2015). We suggest that L2 learners could profit from native speakers’ strategies for language processing and will, with a large set of suffixes, demonstrate how the findings of our research can be used for L2 vocabulary learning. We maintain that L2 pedagogical grammars should pay more attention to derivational suffixes and their combinations, especially to the productive ones. Pedagogical grammars should be enriched with generalizations about the semantics of complex words in terms of suffix combinations (Manova & Brzoza, submitted), e.g. that from complex nouns for places only adjectives can be derived (by the attachment of either *-owy* or *-(V)ny*, as in: *kawiar-ni-owy* ‘café like’, *pracow-ni-any* ‘studio-’; *równ-in-owy* ‘flatlands-like’, *dol-in-ny* ‘valley-like’, etc.). The only exception are lexicalized action nouns; when used as places, such nouns (e.g., *mieszk-anie* ‘living; flat’) can serve as bases for derivation of persons (*mieszk-ani-ec* ‘resident’). We will also discuss how the observation that the semantics of SUFF1-SUFF2 combinations can be modeled without reference to the semantics of the BASE can be used for creation and automatic annotation of a specialized corpus of word-formation, which will be an invaluable resource for educational and research purposes, especially if one considers that there does not exist an electronic corpus of Polish annotated at the level of morpheme.

References

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