Onomasiological Approach to Word-Formation

A comment on Pavol Štekauer: *Onomasiological approach to word-formation*

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The article comments on Štekauer's word-formation model with its six levels: (1) conceptual (= vague categorization), (2) semantic (= gathering semantic markers), (3) onomasiological (= naming in an abstract sense), (4) onomatological (= naming in a concrete sense), (5) phonological. Psycholinguistic findings suggest to combine the first two in a perceptual level. Štekauer's definition of word-formation is enlarged to 'process where existing morphemes are used to construct a new form'. This still fits well into Štekauer's model, as do metaphorical word-formations and semantic changes. Some of Štekauer's auxiliary classifications of words are revised so that they fit regularly into Štekauer's own model. Finally, it is emphasized that concrete classifications should look at the original, not the present-day form of a lexeme.

1. Preliminary Remarks

I first got to know Pavol Štekauer thanks to the internet. He came across my internet journal *Onomasiology Online* (www.onomasiology.de) and offered me a manuscript for publication, in which he presented his onomasiological theory of word-formation (Štekauer 2001). It was a very valuable contribution – at least for my own work, as it was the start of some fruitful exchanges of ideas. I took his theory as a basis and tried to include it in a comprehensive onomasiological model I was establishing, a comprehensive model of lexical, or lexemic, change (for this model cf. my habilitation dissertation, Grzega 2004, with an English summary on pages 281-287).

In his chapter of the *Handbook of Word-Formation* (Štekauer/Lieber 2005) Štekauer presents approaches by Miloš Dokulil, Ján Horecký, Štekauer himself, Bogdan Szymanek, Andreas Blank and Peter Koch. I will confine myself to Pavol Štekauer's theory here. I have also commented on his as well as on Andreas Blank's and Peter Koch's ideas in a word-formation article in *Onomasiology Online* (cf. Grzega 2002). In the following comments I will especially refer to his chapter in the *Handbook of Word-Formation* and focus on three major aspects of his theory, namely (1) Štekauer's model of the word-formation process, (2) his definition of word-formation and (3) some of his definitions and classifications naming units.

2. Štekauer's Model of the Word-Formation Process

Štekauer presents a model where the word-finding process is divided into the following levels:

(1) the conceptual level, where the concept to be named is analyzed and conceptually categorized in the most general way (i.e. "SUBSTANCE, ACTION (with internal

subdivision into ACTION PROPER, PROCESS, and STATE), QUALITY, and CONCOMITANT CIRCUMSTANCE (for example, that of Place, Time, Manner, etc.)" [Štekauer 2001: 11])

(2) the semantic level, where the semantic markers or semantic components are structured

(3) the onomasiological level, where one of the semantic components is selected as the onomasiological basis (representing a class like agent, object, instrument etc.) and another as the so-called onomasiological mark of this basis (the mark can further be divided into a determining constituent—sometimes distinguishing between a specifying and a specified element—and a determined constituent) (= naming in a more abstract sense)

(4) the 'onomatological' level (with the Morpheme-to-Seme-Assignment Principle [MSAP]), where the concrete morphemes are selected (= naming in a more concrete sense)

(5) the phonological level, where the forms are actually combined, respecting morphological and suprasegmental rules.

We may ask, however, on what cognitive or psycholinguistic results this model was constructed. The distinction between the conceptual and the semantic level is not corroborated by psycholinguistic analyses. These rather tells us that we should depart from what we could call a 'perceptual level', where both the more general, 'global' features and the more specific, 'local' features of a concept are processed at the same time (cf., e.g., Mangold-Allwinn et al. 1995: 133ff., Kolb/Wishaw 1990, Navon 1977). This also runs a little counter Štekauer's presentation of a linear, or serial, and structural analysis as suggested for his example of *truck driver*, which he presents in the following way:

(1)   The motivating Object 1 is $SUBSTANCE_1$.

A $SUBSTANCE_1$ is Human.

The Human performs an ACTION .

The ACTION is the Human's Profession (=Agent).

The Human is an Agent.

The ACTION concerns $SUBSTANCE_2$ (=Object of Action).

The ACTION is based on an Operation of $SUBSTANCE_2$.

$SUBSTANCE_2$ is a class of Vehicles.

$SUBSTANCE_2$ is an Object of the ACTION performed by $SUBSTANCE_1$.

The Vehicles are designed for the Transportation of goods.

Etc.

In other words, the two levels in Štekauer's model should be combined, although there are hints that 'global' features might be analyzed more **rapidly** than 'local' features (cf. Dietrich 2002: 124). This level may be called 'perceptual level'.

The semantic level is presented in a way that is clearly based on structural semantics. We may ask whether this does not too much simplify reality. Here, too, prototype linguistics has presented a lot of arguments to include the phenomenon of 'salience' in the classification and analysis of concepts. Štekauer himself mentions prototypicality with the processes on his conceptual level. He should take it into account for the semantic level as well. Moreover, one gets the impression that similarity associations are excluded. This should, in my view, not be the case. Metaphorical expressions such as *skyscraper* or *tapereader* should be included in the Word-Formation Component and can be well explained within Štekauer's model.

It is said that on the onomatological level the concrete morphemes are selected on the Morpheme-to-Seme-Assignment Principle. It should be noted, however, that in some cases this principle may be violated or accompanied by factors like style, word play, analogy and conversational maxims.

Finally, if one wishes to underline the fact that the final step of word-production not only needs to respect phonetic-phonological rules, but also phonotactic rules and morphological usages and features, the term 'morphonological level' might be used instead of 'phonological level'.

3. Definition of Word-Formation

Štekauer assumes that the Word-Formation Component, the Lexical Component and the Syntactic Component are separate cognitive boxes, although there may be interaction between the Word-Formation Component and the Lexical Component. Štekauer says that, on the one hand, the lexicon stores all naming units as well as affixes, and feeds the Word-Formation Component with Word-Formation bases and affixes and, on the other hand, all new naming units formed in the Word-Formation Component are secondarily stored in the lexicon. According to Štekauer, semantic changes happen within in the Lexical Component. It seems clear that the cognitive processes of recurring to an already existing element (in the Lexical Component) and the coining of new elements (in the Word-Formation Component) are different. However, I doubt that the coinage of a new designation by resorting to an already existing element for another concept, traditionally called semantic change, should have more to do with the Lexical Component than with the Word-Formation Component. I have tried to show in my habilitation dissertation that both these name-giving processes (word-formation and semantic change) pass the same levels of the name-giving process (perceptual level, onomasiological level, onomatological level, morphonological level). Moreover, on the various levels influence from other language systems can come into effect. If we keep this in mind, the model also allows us a better understanding of loanwords, loan translations, loan renditions, and semantic loans.

Another point worth debating is Štekauer's definition of word-formation as one hundred percent productive, regular, and predictable. This has led Štekauer to exclude those word-formation types that are traditionally called acronym, blend and clipping. However, the fact that we can imagine synonyms like *truck driver ~ truckist ~ truckman* illustrates that there is also some degree of unpredictability with Štekauer's word-formation types; and the fact that we would expect an acronym *TD* for *truck driver*, but not *TK* or *TV* illustrates that there is some degree of predictability with Štekauer's excluded word-formation types. Thus I vote for a larger definition of word-formation as a process where already existing morphemic material is used to construct a new form.

4. Some of Štekauer's Definition and Classifications of Naming Units

Štekauer describes four plus one different onomasiological types. The fifth one is traditionally called *conversion*. I will come to this type in a moment. The other types are composite formations. They are differentiated by the formal presence and absence of the

onomasiological base, the determined element of the onomasiological mark and the determining element of the onomasiological mark. If we keep in mind, though, that global and local features of a concept are mentally processed simultaneously we may wonder whether we really need the distinction between base and mark. But if we want to stick to it, then some classifications seem worth debating.

The analysis of *doggie* and *summer house* seems unnatural to me. Štekauer classifies them as an example of his Onomasiological Type 3, where the determined constituent of the onomasiological mark is left unexpressed:

(2)   Patient   State   Evaluation (Diminutive)
        dog   *0*   *-ie*

(3)   Temporal Stative   State   Patient
        summer   *0*   *house*

In my opinion it is easier and less constructed to categorize these as Onomasiological Type 4, composite forms with the mark simple and unstructured as in *un-happy*?

Speaking of Onomasiological Type 4, I have the feeling that some items had better be classified as Onomasiological Type 1. Thus, if I understand Štekauer correctly, *sword-swallower* and *blue-eyed* are put under OT 4 because there is no **swallower* and no **scraper*. But isn't the cognitive process still the same as in *truckdriver*? I consider the cognitive focus the most attractive aspect in Štekauer's model; and this focus on the cognitive aspect should be expanded to the definitions of the onomasiological types.

Let us now come to Štekauer's fifth type. I have already tried to illustrate my viewpoint on the phenomenon that is traditionally called *conversion* elsewhere (cf. Grzega 2002, 2004: 116ff.). In Štekauer's view we are dealing with a re-evaluation of the already existing logical spectrum with effects on all the lower levels. He terms this *conceptual recategorization* and gives as one example the case of *databank*: according to Štekauer *databank* originally represents a 'substance'; after conceptual recategorization *databank* becomes an 'action'. But couldn't we equally speak of recategorization with *to dance* and *dancer*—from 'action' to 'agent of action', here of course in combination with a formal change? In my opinion the basic cognitive process is the same for a pair like, for instance, the nouns *cheat* and *cheater*. Therefore, I suggest another view for Onomasiological Type 5. In an onomasiological approach, the starting-point should always be the concept to be named. The concept gets analyzed, and salient features and associations (similarity, contrast, contiguity, partiality, taxonomic relations) are activated in the mind. Then the speaker, or the speech community, selects from the repository of word-formation possibilities and discovers that, particularly with contigual associations, there is also the possibility of selecting a word that is used in a different syntactical position, but typically in a frequent paraphrase for the concept to be named. From the paraphrase *to write an e-mail* or *to use e-mail* the speaker "takes out", without any formal modification, the rhematic, salient part and gets *to e-mail*. In other words, Štekauer's model with its various levels can also be applied to conversion.

What I also note in Štekauer's examples is the occasionally a-historical analysis of words. I think that in an onomasiological model we should really look at a word's shape when it was made and not explain his formation on its present form. Consequently, we would have to look at milcian instead of *to milk*—although this doesn't change its classification as

Onomasiological Type 4, conversion.

5. Final Remarks: The Merits of Štekauer's Theory

Despite the points of criticism raised here one cannot emphasize enough how many valuable ideas Štekauer has introduced in the realm of word-formation.

1. He was the one to recognize that word-formation is about forming, about composing words and not about de-composing words. Whereas traditional models are analytic, Štekauer provides us with a comprehensive onomasiological, synthetic model..
2. He includes cognitive processes in his model. And he includes the role of a speaker and the speech community in his reflections.
3. He refrains from including the classical distinction between affixation and compounds. He sheds new light on the phenomena of 'exocentric compounds', 'conversion' and other things. He subcategorizes naming units not on the basis of the form, but on the interaction of elements and phases before the final form is reached. He thus also changes the form-oriented notion of **head** into a concept-oriented notion.
4. Also personally, as I've already said, his model has given me a lot of impulses for my own comprehensive model of name-giving strategies (Grzega 2004).

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