Deriving locational nouns

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In this paper[1] I consider the derivational creation of nouns of location across languages. Using a sample of 50 languages which are said in the literature to have affixes which derive locational nouns, I search for generalisations about such nouns and their semantic fields. In a second part I reflect on the methodology used here (and in many other similar papers) and consider some of its weaknesses.

Keywords: *derivation, locational nouns, cross-linguistic research, semantic field*

1. Introduction

Everyone needs to talk about locations, and all languages have words for locations of various kinds. These may be locations where particular activities regularly take place, such as battle grounds, bedrooms, fords, restaurants, shops, stadia, streets, swimming pools, universities and so on, or places where particular objects are typically found, such as airports, copses, orchards, paddocks, roads, the sky, universities, wells and so on. Note that these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive: a university may be envisaged as a place where certain activities are carried out (teaching, learning, research) or as a place where certain entities are found (professors, students, research laboratories, ethics committees). As is clear even from the brief list I have given, some of the vocabulary that denotes such locations is fundamental vocabulary, morphologically simple words. In other cases, though, the names of locations are created by means of word-formation, and it is thus reasonable to suppose that some languages will have derivational processes for creating the names of locations − as is, indeed, the case. However, as is also clear from the examples already cited, English does not have a clearly preferred affix or set of affixes whose primary purpose is to do this. English does show derived nouns which are the names of location (as illustrated in (1)), but in every case in English, these affixes have other primary uses, and the derivation of locational nouns is very much a secondary function. Thus the *-age* suffix illustrated in (1a) more regularly derives action/state nominals such as *marriage*; the *-ery* suffix in (1b) more regularly derives collectives (such as *greenery*) or action nouns (such as *butchery*); the *-er* suffix in (1c) more regularly derives agent nouns such as *killer*; and the processes in (1d-f) more regularly derive action/state nouns such as *preservation, insurance, demand*.

(1)   a.   orphanage, vicarage
          b.   piggery, rookery
          c.   diner, smoker
          d.   exhibition, reservation
          e.   entrance
          f.   camp, exit

It should also be noted that not all paradigms have to be morphological. The examples in (2) illustrate a very full lexical paradigm of collective nouns in English where the existence of a collective is almost taken for granted among speakers of English, although the form of the collective is inherently unpredictable, so that speakers have to learn the items individually.

(2)   a bevy of partridges
        a covey of partridges
        an exaltation of larks
        a kindle of kittens
        a murder of crows
        a nye of pheasants
        a parliament of owls
        a sloth of bears

The example in (2) shows that there can be paradigms without there being any morphological way of creating the items in the paradigm. Such paradigms will not be found by the methods used for data-collection in this paper.

The various examples from English raise the questions listed in (3).

(3)   a. Are locations typically denoted by affixes whose primary function is to mark something else (as in English) or whose primary function is to mark location? That is, is English typical or atypical in the way in which it uses derivation to mark location?
         b. If markers of locations are primarily used for something else, are there recognisable patterns in what the primary uses are? That is, are there regular patterns of development of meaning or is the process essentially haphazard?
         c. Do the answers to the questions above affect the way in which we view derivation?

In the next section I shall introduce the methods used in this study, before moving on to look at the results and then providing a critique of this kind of approach to morphological typology.

2. Method

The data discussed in this paper was derived from the reading of standard descriptions of languages (the sources are given in an appendix) and searching for derivational ways of marking location. Because of the methodology employed, nothing can be said about compounds which mark locations, although we might expect compounding to be used to mark locations in those languages which have compounding. However, descriptive grammars do not necessarily illustrate compounding with compounds which denote locations, so that little could be said on the basis of the available data.

The figures given below are derived from a set of 50 languages which were said to have derivational means of creating location nouns. To reach that total, I had to read 85 language descriptions. However, nothing can be deduced on the basis of these relative numbers. The choice of languages was not random, but determined by available materials, and the relative numbers could be pure happenstance, or due to genetic factors (though it is often the case that

languages differ in their use of location marking despite close genetic ties). In fact, just because it was not stated that a particular language has a derivational way of marking location nouns, it cannot be assumed that it has none. While such a fact may suggest that any derivational marking of location nouns is either not productive or not the primary meaning of the affix, the amount of coverage of derivational morphology in general, and of secondary meanings of affixes is not always thorough enough that we can be sure that absence of mention means absence of such forms.

3. Results

In 40/50 languages there are deverbal nouns, which we can gloss as 'a place where you do X'. In 21/50 languages there are denominal nouns, which we can gloss as 'a place where X is found' or as 'a place where X is found plentifully'. Only 3/50 languages show deadjectival nouns, which we can gloss as 'a place that is X'. It must be recalled, though, that not all of the languages considered will have a class of adjectives separate from other word-classes.

Where there are denominal nouns, the function of the affix is usually primarily locational, which is not the case with deverbal nouns as we shall see below. In 11/21 languages with denominal locational nouns, there are also deverbal locational nouns, sometimes with the same affix(es), but not always.

Where there are deverbal locational nouns and the affix has a meaning apart from location, the most common other meaning is instrument. This arises in 14 instances in my data. Other meanings that are shared with location relatively frequently in my data are abstract noun (10 instances in my data), patient noun (8), resultant noun (8) and temporal location (7). The low number of instances of temporal location may be due to the fact that writers simply take it for granted that a locational marker can be used also for temporal location, and do not discuss this option overtly; if it is genuine, however, it seems low in view of the general pattern of marking time and space with the same markers across languages.

Although affixes which denote locations seems to denote a relatively restricted range of other meanings, there does not seem to be any hierarchy of meanings or any implicational scales such as that a language where the marker is used for both location and patient it will also be used for instrument, for instance. This is illustrated in (4), where the primary meaning of the affix as given by the description concerned is listed first, and other meanings follow.

(4)   Camling (Kiranti, Nepal), Cavineña (Tacanana, Bolivia): instrument + location
       Jamul Tiipay (Yuman, California): patient + instrument + location + agent
       Kayardild (Tangic, Northern Territory, Australia): location + agent + instrument + patient
       Maltese (Semitic, Malta): location + instrument + abstract noun
       Marathi (Indo-European, Maharashtra, India): abstract noun + instrument + object noun + location
       Mosetén (Isolate, Bolivia): abstract noun + patient + temporal location + location
       Nivkh (Isolate, Sakhalin Island): location + result
       Torotán (Austronesian, Sulawesi): patient + location

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that affixes so often share the meanings of location and instrument, given that various scholars have commented on the supposed naturalness of a syncretism between instrument and agent (e.g., Booij 1986 and subsequent publications, Dressler 1986). Agent and instrument are marked with the same marker in some languages, but not as often as might be expected on the basis of Western European experience (see Bauer 2001).

To summarise the material on the meanings of deverbal affixes which denote locations, we can say that while some languages certainly do seem to have affixes whose function is to mark location (Abkhaz, Arabic, Chukchee, Evenki, Finnish, Urarina are described this way in my data). There are many more cases where the function of affixes used to denote location might be better described as to denote some subset of arguments of the verb, including agent, patient, instrument, location, temporal location, cognate object, result/product, or even the action itself, and in a few cases rather more specific meanings (locations of past events, etc.).

4. Discussion

Lieber (2012) points out that although English has the suffix *-ee* to denote human patients of actions as in the word *employee* (and the use is extended to non-humans only in a few instances of technical formations in computer science and linguistics such as *raisee*), it has no regular way of forming non-human patient nouns. Yet, she points out, there are many derivatives which denote patient nouns. She cites examples such as those in (5):

(5)   *acquisition, additive, attachment, leavings, package, rental, song, washables*

She points out that non-item-familiar nouns denoting patients are actually widespread, and cites examples such as those in (6) from COCA.

(6)   Ijaz Butt's **blurtings** reveal the beauty of having an inner bookie.
        A lighter-bodied **quaff** that has just enough red and black fruit
        Are you hoarding food and water and **barterables**… in anticipation of the forthcoming… collapse?
        The vinchuca's **excretions** can harbor a protozoan… the cause of Chaga's disease.

Lieber concludes that even if there is no regular patient-forming affix, nonetheless we have a need to name patients, and when the need is there, any word is better than no word at all, so that affixes with other functions are exploited to fulfil the required function. This is not the only place where such a conclusion seems justified for English. Consider the examples in (7) which, at least in synchronic terms, all contain the same affix *-er*, and yet the suffix performs several superficially different functions.

(7)   *killer* (agent)
        washer (instrument)
        diner (location)
        loaner (patient)
        New Yorker (inhabitant; proper noun base)

fiver (with numeral base)
probationer (with nominal base)
foreigner (with adjectival base)

In some instances, the same base and same affix may give rise to homophonous but non-synonymous pairs, which give rise to the question of whether we have contrasting suffixes. A *sleeper* may be a person, railway carriage, rail tie, an object for putting in the ear when ears are pierced, (in America) a sleepsuit for an infant, a film that takes off after a period of doing nothing, a secret agent; (in Britain) a fish. A *smoker* may be a person, a compartment in a railway train, a device for smoking fish or meat, (in America) a social party for men, or an instrument for calming bees. *Keeper* is equally ambiguous in isolation. In fact, where English is concerned, it seems that any nominalisation affix has a host of potential readings. The idea that – in English – a given affix has a narrowly defined meaning is not in line with the data. It may be true that not all possible readings are equally productive, but it is hard to say that a particular reading is not productive.

On the basis of data like this from English and the data collected from 50 languages for the research reported above, it seems that we could be looking at the semantics of deverbal derivatives with false expectations. While it seems that single-meaning affixes can occur, it also seems that affixes with multiple distinguishable meanings are more common. There does not seem to be a predictable route for the spreading of meanings from a core meaning to a vaguer periphery.

From a cognitive point of view, it would no doubt be interesting to be able to trace lines of semantic development, to see whether some of these meanings are cognitively closer to each other than are others of the set. But such a research project would not be possible with the kinds of materials that were used for this study, nor with questionnaires for native speakers. Ideally, not only historical dictionaries would be required, but quite large corpora, so that the productivity and exploitation of various patterns could be judged. While it might be possible to carry out such a research project for a very few extremely well-described languages, it would not be possible over a range of 50 languages, the number used in the research reported here. The materials simply do not exist.

5 Conclusion

Trudgill (2011) looks at social environments in which languages become simpler or more complex. On the face of it, what we see here could be described as a case of complexification. Although we do not here have direct diachronic evidence, it seems that the are a few languages with monosemic affixes, and a lot with polysemic affixes which could imply that the move to polysemy is a case of diachronic development. Certainly, there are other instances that have been discussed diachronically where that is the case, as, for example, the case of English compounds discussed by Hundt et al. (2012). If it is the case that there is complexification here, we need to ask whether it is correlated with some social factor in the environment in which the language is spoken (and therefore whether it happens across the board with all affixes), or whether it happens to individual affixes or word-formation processes. If the latter, we would predict, for instance, that English *-ee* as in *employee* is likely to develop new meanings beyond that of human patient, and that the technical uses in linguistics are simply early precursors of such development. If the former, then it seems to run counter to Trudgill's prediction that complexification is more likely in small, tightly-knit speech communities.

The obvious difficulty in dealing with such matters raises questions for Trudgill's theory of sociolinguistic typology. For Trudgill's theory to be a useful one, we need to be able to tell what is simplification and what is complexification and how these things correlate with other social and linguistic factors.

But the points raised here have wider implications than just those which apply to Trudgill's sociolinguistic typology. The more we look at morphological typology based on form-meaning relations, the more difficult it becomes to unearth a satisfactory typological statement and the more data we seem to need. Although it is controversial to suggest it, perhaps we need a deeper appreciation of the way in which word-formation works in individual languages before we can hope to make typological statements about word-formation.

Appendix:
Languages described as having derivational location markers, and the sources used.
Abkhaz (Hewitt 1979)
Ainu (Shibatani 1990)
Arabic (Holes 1990)
Basque (Saltarelli 1988, Hualde 2003)
Blackfoot (Frantz 1991)
Breton (Press 1986)
Camling (Ebert 1997)
Cavineña (Guillaume 2008)
Chuckchee (Bogoras 1922)
Coos (Frachtenberg 1922)
Evenki (Bulatova & Grenoble 1999)
Finnish (Karlsson 1983, Sulkala & Karjalainen 1992)
Fongbe (Lefebvre & Brousseau 2002)
Georgian (Hewitt 1995)
Hungarian (Kenesei, Vago & Fenyvesi 1998)
Jamul Tiipay (Miller 2001)
Jarawara (Dixon 2004)
Kayardild (Evans 1995)
Kiowa (watkins 1984)
Kolyma Yukaghir (Maslova 2003)
Kusaiean (Lee 1975)
Kwaza (Van der Voort 2004)
Maltese (Borg & Azzopardi-Alexander 1997)
Mam (England 1983)
Maori (Bauer 1993, 1997)
Mapuche (Smeets 2008)
Marathi (Pandharipande 1997)
Mosetén (Sakel 2004)
Ngiti (Lojenga 1994)
Nivkh (Gruzdeva 1998)
Osage (Quintero 2004)
Polish (Szymanek 2010)
Puyuma (Teng 2008)
Qiang (LaPolla 2003)
Sami (Nickel 1994)
Semelai (Kruspe 2004)

Slovene (Priestly 1993)
Spanish (Lang 1990)
Tagalog (Blake 1925)
Takelma (Sapir 1990)
Tamashek (Heath 2005)
Tarascan (Foster 1965)
Tariana (Aikhenvald 2003)
Tongan (Churchward 1953)
Torotán (Himmelmann & Wolff 1999)
Tswana (Cole 1955)
Tukang Besi (Donohue 1999)
Turkish (Lewis 1967, Kornfilt 1997)
Urarina (Olawsky 2006)
West Greenlandic (Fortescue 1984)

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