

Creativity in Word Formation: Theoretical Challenges & Empirical Evidence

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Abstract

What counts as 'creative' and why? This is a particularly interesting question for word-formation, given its nature at the intersection of what might be called regular, 'grammatical' morphology and neology, i.e. the creation of novel words both within and beyond the realms of grammatical morphology. For example, some linguistic theories distinguish 'regular' and 'creative' word-formation processes, the latter typically including lexical blending and all kinds of shortening processes. But even among word-formation processes that are typically considered to be 'regular', some instantiations may be classified as 'creative' (e.g. creative types of compounding, 'extravagant' affixes). In general, however, it is very hard to draw a clear line between 'creative' and 'regular' or 'productive' processes and instantiations. Moreover, such classifications are often based on different sets of criteria, depending on the linguistic theory adopted.

In this class we will take a tour of different word-formation processes and instantiations: compounding, blending, shortening processes, and some types of affixation. Starting out from a systematic introduction to and discussion of criteria that have been proposed to define 'creativity' in word-formation, we will use some concrete example studies to explore different ways of assessing dimensions of creativity by means of empirical evidence. These will comprise corpus-based and experimental studies. In the last part of the class, we will revisit the theoretical questions posed at the beginning in the light of the evidence discussed.