

Back-formation in a new theoretical universe

Convenors: Livio Gaeta (University of Turin) & Fabio Montermmini (CNRS & University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès)

Keynote speaker: Franz Rainer (Vienna University of Economics and Business)

Traditionally, the phenomenon of so-called back-formation occupies only some lines in introductory textbooks in word-formation, and, with few exceptions (Becker 1993, Plag 2003: 27, Rainer 2004), it is discussed even more sparsely in theoretical works, often as cases of “reanalysis/reinterpretation involv[ing] some analogical pressures, especially when the reanalysis is induced by models that exist elsewhere in the language” (Joseph 2001, cf. also Mel’čuk 2001: 532). It is not rare, moreover, that back-formation is included among minor word-formation processes on a par with extragrammatical or marginal morphological phenomena like blending, clipping and the like (Bauer 1983: 232, Lieber 2005: 375, see Štekauer 2015 for a survey).

A further cue of the marginality of the phenomenon is the fact that its borders are fuzzy, and that it is not clear what we should consider genuine cases of back-formation, by contrast with ‘canonical’ derivation. Classic examples include most often cases of affix (suffix) deletion as *burglar* → *burgle* or *baby-sitter* → *baby-sit*. However, both a purely formal criterion or an etymological / diachronic one (which word is attested first) are probably insufficient to provide a full account of the phenomenon. It is likely that semantic and structural criteria also play a role in the interpretation of a morphological relation as being an instance of back-formation.

On the other hand, recent research trends in morphology in various theoretical frameworks have shifted the focus from purely derivational rules to lexical / derivational networks or paradigms. As a consequence, the very role of directionality in word-formation (and more generally in linguistics) has been challenged. In particular, multidirectionality and multiple motivation have been identified as constitutive properties for many derived lexemes. Concurrently, analogy has progressively been recognized as a driving force for derivation, losing its status of a marginal, unpredictable, phenomenon. In this picture, one can wonder whether “back-formation” can still be considered a theoretical relevant concept, or rather a merely descriptive label.

We call for proposals devoted to both theoretical issues and concrete case studies of back-formation in any language, and theoretical perspective. A non-exhaustive list of possible issues to be addressed is the following:

- What is back-formation? Does it correspond to a theoretically relevant notion for linguistics (morphology, lexical semantics, lexicography...)?

- Is back-formation a well-defined set of phenomena? How to determine its borders and content?
- What are the properties of back-formation? What is its relation to subtraction, clipping and other similar phenomena?
- Should back-formation as a diachronic phenomenon be distinguished from back-derivation as a synchronic process on a par with other word-formation processes?
- Is back-formation a universal phenomenon or is it limited to a subset of languages (e.g. to agglutinating morphology)?
- Is back-formation limited to derivation, or should it include inflectional analogical phenomena (e.g. French *château*_{SG} ‘castle’ from etymological *châteaux*_{PL} ‘castles’; Colloquial Italian *perplimere* ‘to perplex’ from the pseudo-past participle *perplesso* ‘perplexed’)?
- Are there cognitive / acquisitional cues that allow distinguishing back-formation from other morphological phenomena?
- What can corpus linguistics – and more generally electronically available data-bases – tell us with regard to the consistence and to the measurability (productivity, frequency, etc.) of back-formation?

Abstracts couched in any theoretical framework are welcome on any topic relating to the above issues. Abstracts should not be longer than 500 words excluding references and should be submitted via EasyChair at the following link: <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=imm20bf>.

Deadline for submitting abstracts in anonymized form: January 31, 2022; notification of acceptance: May 15, 2022.

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