"Uncommon terminations": Proscription and morphological productivity

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Discussions of the standardization of English vocabulary are seldom taken up with questions of morphology. Yet there is a history of, often strikingly similar, attempts to influence the use of particular word-formation processes, such as the proscription of individual lexical items on morphological grounds, or more precisely, the grounds that an affix is being "over-extended". This is not a reference to the whole-sale disapproval of latinate word-formation processes. Frequently, an "over-extended" latinate affix is compared unfavourably to another latinate affix. Examples of proscription considered here are taken from the seventeenth and eighteenth century "branding" dictionaries, periodicals, and style/rhetoric manuals, and, from a rather different milieu, American twentieth century style manuals, which, so many years later, also caution readers not to, for instance, form verbs in *-ize*. Questions I pose in relation to these attempted interventions are: is proscription a response to increased productivity? Do certain processes invite more censure than others? Is proscription a response to innovations in the category of the base? Where proscribers explicitly indicate that another "perfectly good" word already exists, their actions could be considered manifestations of *blocking*, usually a hypothetical event in morphological theory (Aronoff 1976; Bauer 2001). When blockers and over-extenders have distinct identities however, a sociolinguistic account of blocking may be more appropriate.

1. Introduction

In Suzanne Romaine's study of the English suffixes *-ness* and *-ity*, she draws on popular sources for illustration of the productivity of the suffix *-ness*: "The prolificness of *-ness* … has received comment in the popular press. *Time* magazine (1962), for example, takes a decidedly pathological attitude to its spread, regarding the 'over-extension' of *-ness* as a dangerous tendency which is bringing about a decline in English standards" (Romaine 1983:179-180). While the connection that Romaine makes between the high productivity of *-ness* and this popular proscription of its usage could not be interpreted as a theoretical claim, it nevertheless raises interesting questions for scholars of morphological productivity. In this paper I ask whether such proscription is likely to imply (in some relative sense) high productivity, or, put differently, whether there is typically a match

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between the commentator's *perception* of the increased productivity of a rule and what takes place in reality.

The proscription I aim to explore here is precisely this kind of complaint about the "over-extension" of a word-formation process. I am less interested in proscription which is primarily concerned with structural restrictions on a process, for example, ideas about what combinations are possible on etymological grounds, or attempts to regulate the semantics of a WFR, for example the insistence that adjectival suffix *-able* should have a passive meaning (Pegge 1803 in Tucker 1967:71). Objections to the use of a word-formation process are however, seldom articulated so singularly, and it is not possible to isolate complaints about over-productivity in any rigid way.

The notion of a word-formation process being over-used relates to the standardization of vocabulary in complex ways. In studies of language loss such as Gal (1989), Hungarian-German bilinguals use Hungarian word-formation processes productively, but this coining is regarded as a non-standard practice. On one level this means that the bilinguals are using words for which there are existing words in Hungarian (known to monolinguals), but it also means that these speakers do not have the necessary authority to coin words in that speech community. The indexicality of what is considered over-productivity in relation to standard English is less recoverable, and thus the targets of proscription in British and American style manuals are not as readily identifiable.

The modern American style manual, *Errors in English*, advises that: "most *-wise* and *-ize* coinages are rarely suitable in formal writing" (Shaw 1993:90). These formations, while by no means absent in British English, are typically identified as American (Trudgill and Hannah 2002:74) which shows that for Shaw, at least, the standard is to be distanced from American innovation. Other commentators have more narrowly identified *-wise* innovators as engineers, bureaucrats, sports reporters, and musicians (Pulgram 1958, Houghton 1968, Lenker 2002, Cowie 2002). A more thorough investigation of these processes of standardization would attempt to systematically identify these neologisers on the margins. What I aim to do here, in a limited way, is survey historical sources of the proscription of English word-formation processes (section 2). In some cases looking more closely at some of the examples provides insights into the relationship between proscription and productivity, or the absence of such a relationship. In section 3 I suggest some ways in which proscription might be addressed in the study of morphological productivity.

2. Sources of proscription

2.1. Satire

The term "malapropisms" (named after their use by Mrs Malaprop in Sheridan's play The Rivals) covers a range of non-standard lexical usage by speakers who are presented as semi-literate and excluded from an educated class. Milroy and Milroy (1999) define a malapropism as a "lexical confusion" which "arises from accidential similarities between words of different meanings" (1999:34) such as the confusion of *flout* and *flaunt*, and *militate* and *mitigate* (Amis 1980 in Milroy and Milroy 1999). "Over-extensions", however, are sometimes also classed as malapropisms.

Perhaps the more memorable of Shakespeare's malapropisms which feature on Margaret Schlauch's list (Schlauch 1987) are those in which an affix or combining form is confused with another which occurs with the relevant base, for example the use of *comprehend* for *apprehend* (Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*). But her list also includes the following: (the devil) *incarnal* for (the devil) *incarnate* (Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*), *pulsidge* for *pulse* (Mrs Quickly in Henry V), *indubitate* for *indubitable* (Armado in *Love's Labours Lost*). These are variously labelled by Schlauch as "quasi-learned" and "pretentious".

2.2. Periodicals and early style manuals

Susie Tucker's survey of commentary on vocabulary in eighteenth century periodicals and style (rhetoric) manuals includes much proscription that is concerned with individual lexemes and little that is aimed at particular word-formation processes. One possible case of the latter is the *Critical Review* of 1797's denouncing of the lengthening of *habit* and *quiet* to *habitude* and *quietude* as pedantry (Tucker 1967:42-43). The complex forms are in fact loanwords dating from 1400 and 1500 respectively – later than the simplex terms, but certainly not contemporaneous with the Critical Review. Perhaps more interesting is George Campbell's more specific complaints in Vol I Book II Chap III of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) about "good words new modelled" and "frivolous innovations" which "substitute a strange ending for a familiar" (Campbell in Tucker 1967:34), as in:

majestatic for *majestic*
acception for *acceptation*

connexity for *connexion*
martyrised for *martyr'd*
incumberment for *encumbrance*

Taking first citation dates into account, it is only for the last three pairs that the complaint could conceivably be about "over-extension". *Connexity / connexion* and *incumberment / encumbrance* have fairly close citation dates, but the first citation date for *martyrised* is in fact 1450 and for *martyred* 1567. Campbell does not offer us enough examples to detect any patterns in his dispreference, but it may be that he regarded *martyrised* as a modern development.

James Hay Beattie uses the expression "uncommon terminations" in his *Dialogues of the Dead* (1799), also from this period. He may be more systematic in campaigning against particular processes than Campbell. He complains of *referral* (for *reference*) *commital* (for *commitment*), *approval* (for *approbation*), *transferral* (for *transference*) (Tucker 1967:34) [1]. The *-al* terms tend to have much later first citation dates, some even after 1799. Beattie's concerns may therefore be related to contemporary practices.

There is certainly more material in this vein in early modern and modern periodicals and style manuals, but in this initial exploration I am reliant on Tucker's survey.

2.3. Branding dictionaries

Branding undesirable words is a device unique to a set of dictionaries published between 1650 and 1750, and these are an obvious potential source of sustained campaigns against particular word-formation processes. Noel Osselton's (1958) study provides a comprehensive account of these dictionaries including lists of the words branded in each. Osselton speaks of these works as a "unique authoritarian stage" in the development of the dictionary, Samuel Johnson's plans to mark "barbarous, obsolete, poetic and burlesque words" having been abandoned (1958:121). While learned and/or latinate vocabulary makes for a large number of the branded entries, a number of other curiosities, foreign and local, are branded. What I have done is to quantify branded words that are morphologically complex (see Appendix 1), in an attempt to identify any regularity in the branding that might relate to certain affixes, both within and across the dictionaries.

Not all the compilers take the same view of their "undesirable" words. Phillips, an early brander (the table in Appendix 1 lists the

different dictionaries and their editions) is opposed to any use of the words he brands, but Martin, who comes later, wishes only to discriminate against "words which are not to be used in common Discourse, or the general Diction, but on particular Occasions only" (in Osselton 1958:16). The branding dictionaries differ from earlier "hard word dictionaries", which in some cases actually provided readers with words to use if they "wanted to put on a show of learning" (p. 9). Branders wanted to make it possible for their audiences to discriminate, and not, as Phillips says, be "misled into affectation" (p. 28). The expensively produced branding dictionaries were not aimed at the semi-literate, or the uneducated, but leisured readers with gaps in their classical education, who, according to Martin "aimed at the character of being elegant and polite only" (p. 102). In fact, as the dictionaries progress, they become less concerned with branding learned vocabulary and more concerned with branding "cant", dialect words, and archaisms, all of which indicates "an audience wider and better informed than that of the original hard-word dictionaries". The decrease in branding of "learned" words is as follows: Phillips 89%; Kersey 88%; Bailey 48%; Martin 71% (p. 137).

The table in Appendix 1 gives branded words with a particular affix as a percentage of the total number of words branded in that dictionary. The table reflects differences within different editions of the same dictionary, although in many cases these are minimal. It should be noted that the appendix to Phillips' fourth edition is not in itself an edition of the dictionary. Importantly, different dictionaries, for the most part, do not brand the same words as each other [2], which makes the uniformity of branding across the 17th and 18th centuries all the more remarkable (Osselton 1958: 145).

Osselton makes some passing remarks about morphological patterns in this data: he points out the striking similarity in the number of "nouns of action in *-ation* and *-ion*" branded in Phillips and Kersey, and picks up on the proscription of both of the prefixes [3] *un-* and *in-/im-*, the former of which seems to be particularly problematic for Bailey and the latter for Phillips (p. 51). Osselton's other observations regarding the targeting of particular affixes are not however reflected in the data. He suggests a relationship between *-ent* and *-ence*, saying that Kersey's *grandiloquence* and *magniloquence* reminiscent of Phillips's *antiloquent, facilloquent, flexiloquent* and *mendaciloquent*, and comments that proscription of *-graphy* are "shows the writer's dislike of the ending for its own sake", when there are only three such derivations in total.

Apart from the prefix *un-*, which I will return to later, the pro-

scription of complex words is clearly directed primarily at the latinate/learned component. In my analysis I will focus on the only affix that clearly demands investigation on the basis of the data, namely nominalizing *-(t)ion*, but I will also examine the productivity of the verbal suffix *-ize*, which is hardly proscribed at all. For both suffixes I will compare the lists of branded items to the record available from the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED2). Table 1 shows the "chronological profile" for nominalizations in *-(t)ion*, compiled on the basis of first attestation dates in OED2.

Table 1. OED2 chronological profile of *-(t)ion* [4]

1300-1350	111
1350-1400	310
1400-1450	272
1450-1500	229
1500-1550	427
1550-1600	542
1600-1650	1146
1650-1700	764
1700-1750	196
1750-1800	238
1800-1850	482
1850-1900	661
1900-1950	461
1950-	205

It is important to qualify the data presented in Table 1. Firstly, the branding dictionaries themselves are likely to be the source of some of the first citation dates used here. I am disregarding this on the basis of the large data set, but ideally these items should be excluded from the data set. Secondly, the sampling of the eighteenth century for OED2 is shown to be inadequate compared to other periods (see Schäfer 1989), a problem which is being addressed in the third edition of the dictionary. This means that we can comment reliably only up to Phillips' branding of *-(t)ion*. Nevertheless the OED chronological profile is interesting in the light of some of Osselton's theories about branding activity.

Osselton's main contention is that "the work of Phillips, Kersey and the other dictionary makers looks back to the inkhorn disputes of the sixteenth century rather than forward to Johnson" (p. VII). While the bulk of learned words in the Renaissance were never explicitly condemned in their time, the branded entries in the dictionaries are

"thoroughly representative" of the Renaissance (1958:14). The evidence for this is the presence of "dictionary words" (words that have only appeared previously in dictionaries): Phillips (55%), Kersey (22%), Bailey (6.5%), Martin (18%). Osselton (1958:58) further notes that branded French forms in the dictionaries are ones that "had already been current for centuries", and that this is remarkable "at a time when to rage against new-fangled French words was a popular form of entertainment in periodicals".

It is hard to disagree with Osselton when the number of dictionary words in Phillips especially is so high. Yet, looking at the chronological profile for *-(t)ion* in Table 1, it is also hard to believe that Phillips and Kersey are not affected by the productivity demonstrated by the suffix in the first half of the seventeenth century. Table 2 illustrates the proportion of *-(t)ion* words that are "dictionary words" for each compiler (Osselton's classification). While Phillips may be objecting to "dictionary words" in *-(t)ion*, Kersey (who brands more *-(t)ion* words than Phillips) is much less obviously doing so. Furthermore, Table 3 shows that not all the branded items that are "dictionary words" come from sixteenth century dictionaries. It is also interesting to note the proportion of branded *-(t)ion* words that are loanwords (Table 2), which suggests that the dictionary words that Phillips is branding tend to be English coinages from latinate parts, and the non-dictionary words that Kersey (and to a lesser extent Bailey and Martin) is branding are in fact existing Latin and French derivations.

Table 2. Branded *-tion* words

	"dictionary words"	loanwords
Phillips	49%	33%
Kersey	26%	77%
Bailey	10%	82%
Martin	40%	65%

Table 3. First attestation dates of branded words in *-(t)ion* [5]

	before 1600	1600-1650	1650-1700
Phillips	23%	33%	33%
Kersey	36%	35%	17%
Bailey	36%	26%	7%
Martin	43%	35%	9%

In Table 4 the chronological profile of *-ize* is rather similar to that of *-(t)ion*, but without the presence of large numbers of loan-words before the sixteenth century:

Table 4. OED2 chronological profile for *-ize* [6]

1250-1300	1
1300-1350	1
1350-1400	7
1400-1450	5
1450-1500	15
1500-1550	12
1550-1600	140
1600-1650	276
1650-1700	153
1700-1750	60
1750-1800	89
1800-1850	345
1850-1900	424
1900-1950	177
1950-	65

The increased productivity of *-ize* in the seventeenth century does not appear to have attracted the attention of branders, except for Phillips' inclusion of *clempsonize, superficialize, syllabize* in the appendix to his fourth edition. I will return to these items in section 3. Further investigation shows that these are almost all coined words, rather than borrowings from Greek or Latin (formed with the Greek suffix. The popularity of the affix in the nineteenth century may be American usage, accounting for its perception as American. That is speculation, but there is a question to be answered as to how it came to be perceived as such.

3. Proscription and the study of morphological productivity

In the above section I showed that historical records of the productivity of a process can shed some light on proscription, but that the aims of the proscribers are probably too complex to make a direct connection. Furthermore, the historical records are very broadly sketched here. Greater refinement and detail should ultimately allow for more relationships to be drawn between the practices of users and the commentary of critics. I have only produced two "chronological

profiles" here, but a larger set could answer a number of questions, for example, it may be the case that an affix is proscribed because it is in fact decreasing in productivity, rather than increasing. Osselton's understanding of Bailey's proscription of the prefix *un-* (deadjectival formations in *un-* add to up 5% of Bailey's branded words) is that he is "showing such a preference and discriminating … against forms that were going out of currency" (1958:83). There are two aspects of the study of morphological productivity that I would now like to discuss in relation to proscription: blocking, and affix generalization.

3.1. Blocking

For many of the proscribers that we have looked at here the notion of an "over-extension" implies the existence of a target lexeme (often although not exclusively with the same base), and the derivation (or perceived derivation), rather than a synonym, is regarded as an error. Such an example is the Monthly Review of 1759's criticism of the use of *rigidity* (a loanword first attested 1624) instead of *rigour*, an older loan (Tucker 1967:44), and we have seen such examples in Beattie's comments about *-al* nominalizations. I have not used the term "blocking" in relation to these kinds of complaints, because the notion of "blocking", even though it tends to be defined in quite general terms, such as "the non-occurrence of one form due to the simple existence of another" (Aronoff 1976:55-56), is usually understood as taking place within a speaker's mental lexicon. Aronoff's "blocking principle" holds that it is impossible for there to be two words with the same meaning and the same root in one person's lexicon at the same time.

Subsequent accounts of blocking have tried to contend with this principle and the sociohistorical co-existence of such rival lexemes, and Bauer (2001) speaks of a general "acceptance of the failure of blocking". In Romaine's (1983:195) challenge to the blocking principle she claims that "blocking doesn't prevent coining: it acts only as a brake on institutionalisation". Romaine's answer however, is to develop a model of sociolinguistic variation for the case of two rival lexemes with the same base, and her exemplars are competing forms in the nominalizing suffixes *-ness* and *-ity*. But the set of shared bases for these affixes in inevitably rather small in comparison to the number of types in each affix, for this pair and potentially for other such pairs of English derivational affixes. A corpus study [7] of *-ness* and *-ity* (Cowie 1999) finds that for out of a total of 426 *-ness* and 393 *-ity* types, there were

only 8 shared bases. But the difficulty of applying a variationist model to this kind of data does not mean that a sociolinguistic or sociohistorical account of "blocking" (and its failure) should be abandoned. Cases of proscription of a word-formation process are cases of blocking in action, and they are useful material for such an account.

3.2. Affix generalization

The justification for complaints about the productivity of WFRs suggests that affix generalization may play a role in drawing the attention of language "authorities". There is some disagreement in the literature over the relationship between productivity and affix generalization. Romaine (1983), with reference to *-ness*, believes that expansions in the range of word-classes that can occur with an affix *are* related to high productivity, but Baayen and Renouf (1996:84) have argued on the basis of corpus evidence that "it is the semantics of an affix rather than a high degree of productivity as such that drives affix generalisation".

It is interesting that affix generalization is mentioned in the *Time* magazine 1962 article described in the introduction to this paper: "In The CEA Critic … Teacher Foote reports that *ness* added to nouns, pronouns, verbs and phrases – a custom thought until now to be mostly whimsical, as in *whyness* or *everydayness* – has become popular among distinctly unjocose people". Reactions to these kinds of formations could explain why an affix, like *-ness*, which has been productive for such a sustained period, should suddenly attract attention. We would need to be sure that the affix generalizations were contemporary, however, to make such a claim.

Returning briefly to the non-standard *-ize* and *-wise*, perhaps it is not irrelevant that one of Phillips' stigmatized *-ize* words appears on a proper name. Clempson in *Clempsonize* was a notorious thief, but the base may be a popular corruption on "klept". (Osselton 1958:29-30). The verbal suffix has a history of appearing with proper nouns, and this was certainly one of its uses in Greek (e.g. *Hellenize*), which singles it out among the verbal suffixes. So too, adverbial *-wise*, unlike adverbial *-ly* for instance, has, since the middle of the twentieth century, been used fairly exclusively for domain or viewpoint adverbials with a wide range of NP bases, including phrases (Plag, Dalton-Puffer and Baayen 1999, Dalton-Puffer and Plag 2000, Lenker 2002, Cowie 2002).

4. Conclusion

I have, in this paper, attempted to problematise the proscription of word-formation processes, to show that it should not automatically be considered as evidence of the high productivity of those processes. I hope that I have also shown, however, that the "over-extension" type of proscription is nevertheless of interest to scholars of morphological productivity. If the proscription can be appropriately interpreted and contextualized, we may well gain insights into the ways in which vocabulary is standardized.

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Note

[1] Today these pairs would show semantic specialization, but I am assuming that this was not yet the case in Beattie's time, or that the process is in its early stages.
[2] Three of Phillips' brandings are branded in Kersey (*imperforable, inarrable, inadmissable*); six of Kersey's brandings are branded in Bailey (*agglomerate, sodality, pudicity, calidity, surdity, discursive*); two of Bailey's brandings are branded in Martin (*effascinate, congruence*), and two of Kersey's brandings are branded in Martin (*exheredate* and *grandiloquence*).
[3] Prefixes are not included in the table in Appendix 1, and some prefixed and suffixed words would appear twice and the percentage of branded words accounted for by the processes listed in the table (last row) would be inaccurate.
[4] This is preliminary data which is part of a project to compile a range of such profiles using the OED2 Online, a project supported by British Academy grant RB103874. Researchers are Claire Cowie and Dawn Hindle, with the assistance of the Oxford English Dictionary.
[5] A number of branded words in *-(t)ion* do not appear in OED2.
[6] See note 4.
[7] The ARCHER corpus (1650-1990).

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Appendix 1
Complex words branded in Phillips, Kersey, Bailey and Martin (suffixes)

	1658	1662	1671	1678	App	1696	1706	1708	1715	1720	1721	1727	1749	1754
Total words	11 000							20000	20000	20000	20000		24500	24500
Total branded	95	98	96	86	53	38	309	316	314	305	312	950	210	240
-ize	0	0	0	0	5.6	0	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.7	1	0.8
-ify	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	0.4
-ate	5.3	5.1	5.2	5.8	9.4	0	1	0.9	3.5	0.9	3.2	4.9	13.4	13.3
-al	4.2	4.1	3.1	1.2	7.5	0	1	0.9	1	0.9	1	1.9	0	0
-ic	3.2	3.1	3.1	2.3	5.6	2.6	1	0.9	1	1	1	0.2	0	0
-ive	1.1	1	1	1.2	0	2.6	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.6	1.2	1	0.4
-able	11.6	11.2	7.3	9.3	1.8	13.2	4.5	4.4	4.1	4.6	4.2	4.8	2	1.7
-a/ent	5.3	5.1	4.1	4.6	7.5	0	4.5	4.4	1.6	4.6	1.6	2	1	0.8
-ous	6.3	6.1	6.3	5.8	7	2.6	5.2	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.8	2.8	6.5	5.4
-ment	1.1	1	1	1.2	0	0	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	2.3	0	0
-ity	7.4	7.1	3.1	3.5	5.6	2.6	6.2	6	6.3	6.2	6.1	4.6	8	5.8
-ness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.9	0	0
-ation	30.5	29.6	15.6	17.4	1	13.2	45.3	45.6	45.5	45.9	45.8	10.6	11.4	9.6
-ude	1.1	1	0	0	0	0	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.6	1	0.8
-ure	1.1	1	1	1.2	0	2.6	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	3.9	3.3
-e/ance	3.1	3.1	1	1.2	1.8	0	1.6	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.2	1	3.4	2.9
-e/ancy	1.1	2	1	1.2	1.8	2.6	1	0.9	1	1	1	0.8	0.5	0.4
-ism	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-ology	1.1	1	0	2.3	1.8	0	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0	1	0.8
-ist	0	0	0	1.2	2.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.5	0.4
Total %	83.5	81.5	53.8	52.4	58.7	42	73.9	73.4	73.3	73.6	73.3.	41.3	55.1	46.8

1658, 1662, 1671, editions of Phillips' *New World of Words*
App: appendix to Phillips 4th edition
1706, 1720 Kersey's revision of Phillips
1708, 1715, 1721 Kersey's *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*
1727 Bailey's *Universal Etymological Dictionary*
1749, 1754 Martin's *Lingua Britannica Reformata*