

Abstract Naming Units in Business English

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Abstract

Presenting partial results of business English language research and its subsystem – abstract nouns, deverbal and deadjectival, which represent highly frequent naming units in present day business English, their generation by the word-formation process of derivation and their occurrence in practice. The generation of abstract naming units contributes to the general recognition in linguistics that new naming units are not formed accidentally or arbitrarily, and word-formation processes follow certain general rules and principles unified under the term word-formation type. In terms of specific language communication, abstract nouns represent the lexical attribute within the tendency to nominal expression in language.

1. Vocabulary as an open sub-system of language

As a relatively open sub-system of language reflecting changes in social, economic, political, cultural, scientific and technical conditions of society where users of language live, vocabulary plays the role of an intermediary between language and reality. With respect to its primary function, communication, it provides users with adequate tools and resources for the expression of the language they use. It is the subject of synchronic lexicology research as the science of current language vocabulary and its research territory includes lexis as the lexical component of language covering all lexical units. The system of vocabulary, the movement in it, its extension and enrichment by new naming units are all influenced by internal and external factors of the language system, and the system is dependent on specific conditions which the speakers of the language live in. Besides these factors, generating new naming units is motivated also by mental factors such as attitude and subjective relationship of language users to the phenomena, processes and reality to be denominated. The changes in all spheres of life find reflection in general vocabulary, in vocabulary of all language styles, but especially in the language of science, business and journalism which respond to changes in language communities conditions most often and most rapidly. New phenomena, processes and reality can be denominated by formally adapting naming units of foreign origin, or they can be denominated either by new naming units created from units of the native language, or by using already existing naming units in different meanings. When language is spoken of as a system and a system of sub-systems, it is inevitable to say that vocabulary is a sub-system with principles and organisation. It is characterized by various language relations such as relations between content and form, word-formation relations and relations between lexical units in the lexical and semantic system representing association bonds between units in the human mind.

2. Abstract naming units

The vocabulary of language for specific purposes is understood as a set of naming units typical for specific language styles. There is no other inventory of naming units reflecting social processes caused by the development of science and technology and economic as well as social development more consistently than the language of science, technology and business.

New phenomena, processes, technological procedures and equipment are being developed and differentiated. As a result, there is a demand to make new naming units to denominate the processes, procedures and generalized phenomena and to extend the inventory of naming units coined as naming units of abstract actions, states, processes and procedures. This causes the growth of a 'terminology fund of the language'; new naming units are generated, some terms quit the vocabulary, their structure is changed, and the need to differentiate naming units semantically arises.

Abstract naming units are characteristic features of the present day language style of science, technology, business and journalism, and they create an individual subgroup of naming units from the point of view of the inventory of the vocabulary system. From the point of view of terminological use, **abstract naming units** designate processes, methods, technological procedures, ways of processing materials and administration acts.

In current language, these naming units form a very dynamic sub-system of vocabulary, a sub-system in the process of continuous movement and development with the phenomena characteristic for vocabulary in its nominal and communicative aspect. As already mentioned, the dynamism of abstract naming units is influenced by several factors, and it exposes some general and universal tendencies operating in the language.

The majority of naming units denominating abstract actions, processes and procedures are nominal naming units – i.e. **nouns**, which express 'independently existing' (Mistrík *et al.* 1993) items and phenomena of reality and they are characteristic for scientific language. For this reason, the meaning and form of abstract naming units and their teaching is paid great attention in current specific language styles.

In general, forming abstract naming units and the movement in abstract vocabulary represent the tendency towards making up terminology and intellectualising the speech of language users, and thus also the tendency towards "higher", more sophisticated forms of language communication. On the other hand, as their generation and stylistic and semantic differentiation among them support the tendency towards intellectualising in the language, abstract naming units are in contradiction to the opposite tendency – the tendency to make language more democratic.

To generate abstract naming units, one of the word-formation processes English uses, is **derivation**. The objective of this paper is to expose the situation in **generating nouns within abstract lexis - deverbal and deadjectival nominal abstract naming units**, using suffixes as mentioned below. They are used for coining naming units denoting objectification of action and quality, and the names of metalanguage concepts as terminological names in the style of business English.

It is necessary to recall that, in coincidence with major linguistic recognition on generating new naming units, abstract nouns are not formed accidentally or arbitrarily, and the word-formation process of derivation like all the other word-formation processes follows certain general rules and principles. A lot of suffixes involved in generating abstract nouns are formally identical with suffixes in general language, but they are used stylistically differently. Moreover, scientific language styles make use of specific suffixes typical for the style, so their use can be limited to a certain language style. The occurrence of typical suffixes as well as those which exist in general language and are involved in generating naming units can be simply explained by the fact that a lot of naming units from general language have been included into the terminological systems of specific language styles as terminology units, and by the fact that these styles use not only terminology units but also naming units which are on the boundary between terminology and general naming units. The suffixes forming either terminology units or general naming units are identical in form, but they are not identical either partially or completely in meaning. As for the suffixes used to form deverbal and

deadjectival abstract nouns, they are observed to be very stable, and the changes which happen in their set are insignificant.

To make a review of suffixes (more or less productive) which are involved in generating deverbal and deadjectival abstract nouns in business English as one of the specific styles of language, it is necessary to understand from the outset, that they are word-formation elements that are not only characteristic for the language of business English; they are the language elements involved in the formation of lexical units in technical and natural science fields, too. The review is intended to provide the survey of a certain predetermined part of vocabulary which specialists in the field as well as teachers and students have to face. The research has been carried out on a corpus consisting of business English texts, the communicative style exposing a high frequency of abstract naming units. Lexical units have been observed in the overall context of sentences or larger communication units, not as isolated units.

The theoretical background of the research is based on **the onomasiological theory of word-formation** created by Miloš Dokulil (1962, 1966) and the **onomasiological theory of linguistic sign** created by Ján Horecký (1983, 1989), who dealt with Slovak and Czech word-formation, and thus the original **onomasiological method** is applied to fit the specific features of these two languages.

The application of this method was originally focused especially on two main word-formation processes in these languages: composition and derivation. Therefore it was necessary to apply the basic principles of the method to the nature of remaining word-formation processes. This was carried out by Pavol Štekauer who firstly developed the model of conversion based on onomasiological principles in his *Theory of Conversion in English* (1996) and later the onomasiological model of word-formation in *An Onomasiological Theory of English Word-Formation* (1998).

The fundamental principles of the onomasiological theory of word-formation introduce basic terminology such as *onomasiological structure*, *onomasiological category*, *onomasiological base*, *onomasiological mark*, or *onomasiological connective* and *word-formation type*, not omitting *semantic motivation*, and special attention is paid to the concept of *productivity* and its aspects. As all these phenomena are outside the scope of this paper, they are not intended to be discussed here in detail.

3. The Notion of Word-Formation Type

Generally it is recognised, as already mentioned above, that new naming units are not formed accidentally or arbitrarily. Word-formation processes follow certain general rules and principles termed 'word-formation type'. For this reason, it is necessary to discuss, at least briefly, the concept of word-formation type.

If we made the most simple definition of a word-formation type, it would be characterized as a pattern for generating new naming units when they are demanded for communication by language users. There are different conceptions of this notion depending first of all on the methodological approach of the authors. The concept of word-formation type accepted here follows Štekauer's (1998) definition starting from the original ideas of Miloš Dokulil (1962, 1966) and Ján Horecký (1983, 1989).

Ján Horecký defines the word-formation type with respect to Slovak derivation as a fixed combination of a word-formation base and a word-formation element **including** corresponding alternations of sounds. This combination carries a certain general meaning. Štekauer points out that delimitation of the word-formation type should be examined for the individual word-formation processes since the nature of these processes is different. The same must be reflected in the definitions of the word-formation type, and Štekauer says that the

definition of a word-formation type depends on the specific language type because one and the same definition cannot be applied to different languages due to their different characteristics. However, he believes that there are some common rules that may be applied to most, if not all, word-formation processes. These are common onomasiological and semantic structure and common formal structure. The method selected for the delimitation of word-formation type is simply one which is possible out of a number of other possibilities.

In accordance with the accepted definition, Štekauer's (1992: 36) definition of a word-formation type is

a three-level model that is based upon the category of **word-class** as the most general grammatical category. The second classification level is represented by the **onomasiological categories** and the third level criterion are **logical** and **semantic relations** between the polar members of the onomasiological structure (onomasiological connective).

These three formal criteria are, in the case of derivation, completed by the criterion of the word-class of the motivating naming unit as well as that of the prefix or suffix type, which divides a word-formation type into subtypes. This approach enables linguists to explore which suffixes play the same role on the onomasiological level of a word-formation process. In the word-formation process of derivation the result of the process, a motivated naming unit, is identified as a binary structure.

From the point of view of linguistics, abstract nouns are expressed by two transpositional categories - *objectification of action* (in cases of deverbal nouns) and *objectification of quality* (in cases of deadjectival nouns), and their function is to present non-objective contents as objective.

In English the sub-system of abstract vocabulary within the category **objectification of action** is represented by the following word-formation types (verbal base + suffix):

- **verbal base + suffix -age**

Z_{adj} + -al, -ial: remove → removal, reverse → reversal, renew → renewal
money withdrawal, damage appraisal, refusal of the application, to draw up proposal,

- **verbal base + suffix -ance, -ence**

Z_v + -ance, -ence: accept → acceptance, assure → assurance, exist → existence,
quality assurance, educational allowance, adherence to contract terms, maintenance of rights,

- **verbal base + suffix -ing**

Z_v + -ing: master → mastering, process → processing, strengthen → strengthening,
data processing, check bearing, cost accounting,
to pay for the planting, decision making, public finance accounting,

- **verbal base + suffix -ation -ion**

Z_v + -ation, -ion: accumulate → accumulation, authorize → authorization,
combust → combustion
authorization of financial statements, bank supervision,
tax calculation, selection of goods, price reduction

- **verbal base + suffix -ment**

Z_v + -ment: assess → assessment, manage → management, treat → treatment
professional development, non-cash payment, appraisal of product capacity,
franchise agreement, account management

- **verbal base + suffix -our**

Z_v + -our: behave → behaviour
buyer behaviour

- **verbal base + suffix -ure**

Z_v + -ure: close → closure, proceed → procedure, expose → exposure
selection procedure, credit exposure, failure of evidence

- **verbal base + suffix -y**

Z_v + -y: apologize → apology, assemble → assembly, discover → discovery
right to discovery of documents, expiry of insurance

Type **verbal base + suffix -ation -ion** (and other variants -(s)ion, -tion, -ition such as in the examples *nationalization, reversion, transmission*) shows the highest productivity and frequency (Bauer 1983, Bareš 1976) in both general English as well as technical and natural science English. The research confirms the high usage of this type for generating naming units in business English. The suffix is especially linked to the word-formation base not ending in *-ate*, e.g. *authorize* → authorization, *condemn* → *condemnation*, *float* → *floatation* and to the verbal base ending in *-ize*, e.g. *categorize* → *categorization*, *capitalize* → *capitalization*. This confirms the evidence of the research done by Bareš (1976).

High productivity is shown in the type **verbal base + suffix -ing** such as in the examples *back* → *backing*, *bill* → *billing*, *shift* → *shifting*. This type mostly forms nomina actionis. Considering its high productivity and the demand for denomination of various activities and new technological methods, this word-formation type is involved in generating deverbal nouns in all fields of current English. The research confirms this fact in the field of Business English too.

Type **verbal base + suffix -ure** is introduced in linguistic sources (Bauer 1983) as non-productive, and similarly the type **verbal base + suffix -our**. The research we have done so far validates the claim that there are few abstract nominal naming units generated by the type **verbal base + suffix -age** in business English.

It is important to recognize the fact that business English comprises a lot of scientific naming units which, in the identical form, can present both abstract and concrete naming units (*abandonment, endorsement, removal*). The decisive factor is the meaning and contextual incorporation of the unit. Another aspect of deverbal abstract nouns that draws attention is the competitiveness of word-formation types, as in the following examples: type with suffixes **-ation, -ion** vs type with suffix **-y** (*expiration – expiry*), type with suffix **-ation, -ion** vs type with suffix **-ing** (*accumulation – accumulating*), and type with suffix **-ing** vs type with suffix **-ment** (*paying – payment*).

Within the abstract noun sub-system denoting **objectification of quality**, there are the following word-formation types involved in generating abstract nouns:

- **adjective base + suffix -(abil)ity, -(ibil)ity**

Z_{adj} + -(abil)ity, -(ibil)ity: absorbable → absorbability, workable → workability
accountability to the owners, act liability, convertibility of banknotes

- **adjective base + suffix -ity**

Z_{adj} + -ity: sensitive → sensitivity, actual → actuality
total loss actuality, price sensitivity, capital productivity,
the amount of responsibility, long-term sustainability, financial stability, economic variability

- **adjective base + suffix -cy**

Z_{adj} + -cy: accurate → accuracy, constant → constancy,
accuracy description, cost constancy, pay of proficiency, economic variability

- **adjective base + suffix -ce**

Z_{adj} + -ce: dependent → dependence, excellent → excellence,
relative tax dependence, reputation for excellence

- **adjective base + suffix -hood**

Z_{adj} + -hood: false → falsehood
calculation falsehood

- **adjective base + suffix -dom**

Z_{adj} + -dom: free → freedom
tax freedom

- **adjective base + suffix -ness**

Z_{adj} + -ness: stiff → stiffness, bright → brightness, fair → fairness
falseness of a statement, fairness of the judicial system,
genuineness of trademarks

- **adjective base + suffix -ion**

Z_{adj} + -ion: precise → precision, requisite → requisition
method of ultimate precision, requisition of services.

Bauer (1983) states that there is high productivity of the type **adjective base + suffix -ness**, which is used to generate nominal units from already existed forms, where it replaces different suffixes as in the example *certainty – certainness*. Semantically, taking into account both suffixes, it is more simple and thus it is the tool for forming pairs of naming units which can be semantically differentiated by language users: *sincereness – sincerity, productiveness – productivity*. Types **adjective base + suffix -dom** and **verbal base + suffix -ure** are considered (Bauer 1983) to be non-productive in generating nominal units in present-day English, and the results of the research confirm this claim. At this point in the research, which is not yet completed, the productivity of the other word-formation types is not being introduced.

4. Conclusion

Currently, business English is in a period of immense boom, and it participates in enrichment of the sub-system of abstract nouns, and with respect to its highly frequent use, it is an appropriate source for linguistic research. The results of research show that the sub-system of abstract vocabulary is divided internally and it is very rich and open for new naming units. This results from the fact that language permanently needs to express the distinctive features of real phenomena, either as static or dynamic features of those phenomena. The demand is especially distinctive in business communication, although its impact is strongly apparent in all other language styles. There is social demand for including abstract vocabulary in all language styles in connection with the massive development of science, technology and society, and the incorporation of their products into the everyday life of speaking communities.

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