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COMPATIBILITY OF SEMANTICS OF SUFFIXES WITH GENDER ASSIGNMENT IN OLD ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The article reveals the research results of a correlation between principles of gender assignment and meaning of coined words. In Old English, derivatives belonging to three genders (masculine, feminine and neuter), inherited from Proto-Indo-European legacy, were numerous and their suffixes were determined to some extent on the basis of semantic criteria. Our research aimed at investigating the possibility of a connection between genders of suffixes and the semantic peculiarities of their derivatives. To carry the analysis and identify the meaning of suffixes, we set 21 semantic groups which were characteristic of Old English derivatives. The findings suggest that there are certain semantic regularities that are part of the gender assignment system in Old English. The majority of masculine and feminine suffixes are responsible for nouns belonging to $3-5$ semantic groups while the neuter suffixes have from 2 to 4 semantic groups. Thus, it is possible to divide suffixes according to their primary semantic content. The paper provided evidence that derivatives of each gender have the following semantic segments: notions of people, administration and social stratification for masculine suffixes; abstractions, feelings and emotions, traits of character and activities for feminine ones, and structures, locations and lifeless objects for neuter suffixes. It was also evident that semantic peculiarities of Old English suffixes build a ground for the competition between them and are vital for their further development in an English language course.

Contribution/ Originality: This study is one of very few studies which have investigated gender allocation of Old English derivatives in its connection to semantic motivation, suggesting the principles of correlation between semantic groups/meaning and the gender of nouns coined in this period.

1. INTRODUCTION

The way in which nouns are assigned to different genders is an urgent matter to probe. Linguists define genders with the emphasis on grammar such as this one: genders are 'paradigmatic classes of nouns, established on syntagmatic evidence' (Loporcaro, 2018). These definitions underline that 'gender systems just provide a grammar-internal set of oppositions to define paradigmatic classes' (Acquaviva, 2020). Gender is thus a property of structures because structural properties can predictively derive the constrained distribution of semantically motivated gender assignment (Acquaviva, 2020). The possibility of semantic motivation for gender in the English language is raised in many works of linguists. Some studies on gender in Old English include Zubin and Köpcke (1981); Dolberg (2012); Vezzosi (2006) and others. Although they differ in several aspects, they agree on the fact that gender assignment must have specific principles, either morphological or semantic. Linguists like Otto Jespersen and Dieter Kastovsky have stated that suffixes form networks of semantic meanings such as 'agent', 'means' or 'result of action', which are common to all of them and which cluster around a central semantic notion such as 'action/fact' not taking into consideration gender specification (Lloyd, 2007).

The Old English gender system offers many questions to discuss. They started from the development of the three-gender system as seen in this comment: 'in spite of general agreement regarding the relatively recent character of the sex-based three-gender system known from most Indo-European languages, held to have replaced an earlier (Proto-Indo-European) animacy-based two-gender system, how exactly this development came about has been a matter of discussion for over a century' (Luraghi, 2011). This debate ended with the loss of the gender category in the Middle English period. One of these questions – the compatibility of gender and semantics – is widely discussed in researches of modern languages: Italian (Popov, Miceli, Ćurčić-Blake, & Bastiaanse, 2020) Dutch (De Vogelaer, Fanta, Poarch, Schimke, & Urbanek, 2020) Spanish (Molinaro, Su, & Carreiras, 2016) and others, while the correlation between gender assignment and semantic meaning in English can be answered only by means of the analysis of the Old English noun derivatives.

The system of grammatical gender of the given period was not determined by sex but was based on the system of declension. It survived in all Germanic languages with appropriate phonological changes. The system of declension in Germanic language and, thus, in Old English included consonantal nouns (n-stem as one), vocalic nouns (a-stem, o-stem and others) and athematic nouns (Hogg, 1992). Each group had its peculiarities in terms of gender. Richard Hogg in his work offers a diagram that gives the approximate proportion of nouns in each of the main types (consonantal and vocalic): Masculine vocalic – 35%; Masculine consonantal – 10 %; Feminine vocalic – 25%; Feminine consonantal – 5%; and Neuter vocalic – 25% (Hogg, 1992).

This time period is vital because it is to be expected that gender as a grammatical category of the English noun existed only in this period. Though it is believed that this category was eliminated in the Middle English period; many pieces of evidence can be given to prove that even in Old English there existed different deviations in terms of gender representation. Corbett in his work highlighted that English formerly had a morphological assignment system (Corbett, 1999). However, even Old English showed examples of the gender of personal pronouns being determined by semantic criteria (irrespective of grammatical gender); most significantly, the inanimate could take a neuter pronoun, even though they were grammatically masculine or feminine. Of course, the fact that English lost almost all declensional distinctions meant that the system of gender assignment would in any case be changed. But the change was not so straightforward as was often believed; indeed, it was called 'one of the most difficult problems of English philology'.

What is commonly misunderstood is that the change to a semantic assignment system during Middle English had already begun before the loss of the declensional distinctions. While the stages of the change involved considerable complexity, the nature of the change was clear; English moved from having a morphological assignment system to a semantic one (Corbett, 1999). Stroinska (1986) shared Corbett's point of view adding that

there were two major requirements, which governed the choice of gender resolution rules, namely: (1) semantically justified gender forms should be used; and (2) such justified forms must bear a clear marking of number (Stroinska, 1986).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the languages marking gender distinction for nouns denoting animate entities and for those denoting inanimate entities, the first principle may apply only to the first group (Stroinska, 1986). Thus, we can see that semantic motivation was mostly considered to be purely for animate nouns gender allocation. Another significant question raised by Lieber Rochelle concerning restrictions on stacking up derivational suffixes, specifically, semantic restrictions on suffixation was: 'To what extent is the attachment of a particular suffix dependent on the semantic characteristics of its base?' Not surprisingly, given the general lack of attention to suffixal semantics, there has been relatively little work done on the semantic restrictions on affixation. So, it was essential to examine the extent to which particular affixes selected for particular syntactic categories of bases could show concomitant semantic selection (Lieber, 2004).

The question that still remains is the principle of gender assignment. According to Corbett (1999), gender assignment depends on two basic types of information about the noun: its form and its meaning. Accordingly, formal and semantic gender assignment systems can be distinguished. Old English has a lexical gender-system which is semantically, formally or idiosyncratically determined (Dolberg, 2012), while a few scientists claim that semantic fields show a certain tendency to homogenize with regard to the gender of their members (Jones, 1967). Others, like Zubin and Köpcke, contradict stating that a given semantic field tends to feature all genders, in order to maximize contrast and for ease of reference-tracking (Zubin & Köpcke, 1981).

Vezzosi (2006) states that besides semantic traits such as [± animate] [± human], further semantic differentiations, significant from an anthropological or cultural point of view, such as [± containing] [± power], are related to gender variability. However, semantic features such as [± animate] or [± power] play roles in gender assignment systems in the languages of the world. Gender assignment in Old English seems to be sensitive to another unexpected feature, namely semantic roles: more precisely, masculine and feminine genders are preferred when the noun plays the role of an agent, whereas neuter gender is selected for the patient. This parameter like the other semantic features interfering with the Old English grammatical gender assignment, will be shown to derive from the same and more general principle [± individuated] (Vezzosi, 2006).

In a sense, all gender systems are semantic because there is a semantic core even in formal gender assignment systems; for example, in Old Germanic languages, nouns with animate and more constantly human referents very rarely conflict with their formal gender. Nevertheless, in formal systems, irrespective of any semantic-biased considerations, the rules for gender assignment primarily depend on the form of nouns rather than their meaning. In those systems, information for gender assignment may, in turn, be word-structure, comprising derivation and inflection (morphology) and sound-structure (phonology) (Vezzosi, 2006). It is obvious that gender may change between a nominal base and a derivative, and this depends on the gender-assigning function of some specific suffixes. Here we may adhere to the point of view of Pounder (2000) who states that semantic relationships between a complex word-formation and its base are incorporated on several layers of meaning: lexical meaning, "categorial" meaning, and word-formation meaning. It means that we classified the bases according to their meaning and established the meanings of word-formations first, and then on the basis of obtained data, we formulated main formation rules and thus validated the suffix meanings.

In this paper, we attempted to provide the answer to the correlation between gender and meaning as a motivation for the derivational process of Old English in general. Our hypothesis is that gender determines the semantic meaning of the suffix and thus its derivatives. It is the continuation of the statement offered by Mel'čuk (2006) who stated that "We say that agreement classes of the noun in language are genders (noun genders) if and

only if a few conditions are simultaneously satisfied to a sufficient degree: These genders manifest a direct link with the biological sex of being denoted by the noun: a noun referring to a male belongs to one class and that referring to a female to another class... Beside the sexual division, these classes do not show a sufficiently visible semantic motivation: in most cases, there is no direct link between the meaning of a noun and its gender" (Mel'čuk, 2006). But later in the same research, the author made an assumption that the absence of semantic motivation for gender was not absolute. This suggests that a derivational suffix often imposes a particular gender on a derived noun and in this way establishes a correlation between meaning and gender. Even among non-derived nouns, a number of semantically related nouns can end up regrouped in the same gender under the influence of semantic analogy. Though this phenomenon is rather exceptional for gender, it is limited and disparate (Mel'čuk, 2006).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The material of the article included 1357 nouns formed by means of suffixation (23 suffixes) in the Old English period selected from *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* edited by J. Bosworth and T.N. Toller: -ung (f; 375 derivatives), -ness (f; 337), -scipe (m; 87), -cræft (m; 81), -weard (m; 60), -stów (f; 56), -dóm (m; 48), -hád (m; 47), - ling (m; 41), -rǽden (f; 40), -lác (n; 28), -leást (f; 27), -els (m; 22), -ríce (n; 20), -þu (f; 18), -wíse (f; 16), -wist (f; 13), -incel (n; 12), -oþ (n; 10), -sǽta (m; 7), -mód (n; 7), -cen (n; 5) (Bosworth, 2014). In the analysis we thus focused on suffixes and their characteristics on the bases of derivation.

It is believed that bases of derivation can show tendencies that can explain or help us understand the further development of the semantic content of coined words. To carry the analysis, we have set 21 semantic groups to identify the meaning of derivatives and bases and defined this process as creating a meta-language for our investigation. We did not include suffixes with the meaning of a performer of an action indicated by the root verb, as gender assignment is obvious in the case. Some of the groups seem to be close in meaning, for example, "Activities" – "State" – "Result" or "Notions of Humans" – "Family", but we adhered to our meta-language with the purpose of finding possible semantic peculiarities. The following 21 groups were discussed in this study:

Group 1 Notions of Humans
Group 2 Social Stratification
Group 3 Family
Group 4 Administration
Group 5 Traits of Character
Group 6 Feelings
Group 7 Skills/knowledge
Group 8 Age
Group 9 Abstractions
Group 10 Social Activities
Group 11 Physical Activities

Group 12 Physiological Activities
Group 13 Result of Actions
Group 14 State
Group 15 Religion
Group 16 War
Group 17 Animals
Group 18 Lifeless Objects
Group 19 Food/Taste
Group 20 Structures
Group 21 Locations

The given semantic peculiarities were considered as prominent not only for the Old English meaning of suffixes, but also for their further development in the English language and their modern specialization of meaning. As the next step of this research, an analysis of all suffixes was conducted on the basis of their derivatives semantic characteristics. Its aim was to establish semantic peculiarities of each suffix separately. The most productive gender in terms of formation was feminine (882 nouns), followed by masculine – 393 nouns and neuter with 82 derivatives. In this analysis the correlation was stated between suffixes and semantic groups with number of derivatives being considerable for the overall number of coined nouns.

4. ANALYSIS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

This section presents the analysis of masculine, feminine and neuter derivatives in Old English and established definite peculiarities for suffixes of each gender of the period. A few criteria were set to define the meaningful correlation between suffixes of a certain gender and semantic groups, namely, there should be at least three suffixes coining nouns of a certain semantic group for feminine and masculine genders and two –

for neuter. This distinction can be explained by highlighting the difference in the number of suffixes and derivatives of each gender.

4.1. Masculine Suffixes

Semantic peculiarities of the first group of derivatives that comprised masculine nouns are presented in Figure 1.
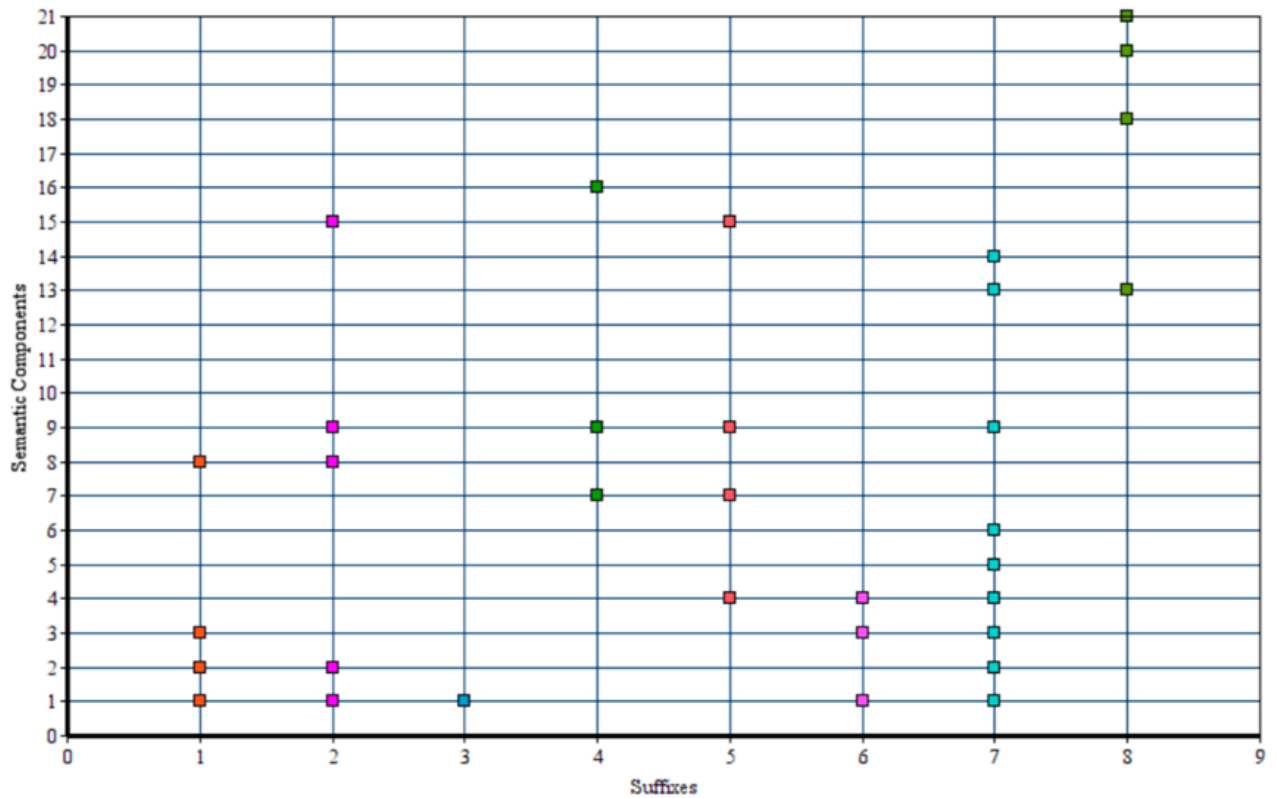
1 -ling, 2 -hád, 3 -sǽta, 4 -cræft, 5 -dóm, 6 -weard, 7 -scipe, 8 —els
Figure-1. Masculine Suffix Semantization (Semantic Groups 1, 2, 3, 4, 9).

Derivatives belonging to the masculine gender show certain tendencies in their semantics. First of all, it should be mentioned that suffixes *-scipe* and *-cræft* are the most productive among masculine suffixes, each being responsible for almost one-fifth of all coined nouns (87 and 81 respectively). Second, the average number of semantic groups for each suffix coined could be 3 to 5 with two deviations: *-scipe* coined nouns belong to 9 groups and *-sǽta* – to only 1 group. Both suffixes are described in more details below. Third, six suffixes (-*ling, -hád, -sǽta, -dóm, -weard, -scipe*) were grouped under the general heading *People* with specifications of *Humans, Social Stratification, Family*, and *Administration*.

The following examples illustrate our statement. The overall anthropocentric meaning of masculine derivatives is thus supported by a secondary semantic group that was realized by this group of suffixes. For example, semantic group *Age* not being frequent in terms of derivatives number can be created by two masculine suffixes *–ling* and *-hád*.

Family

sib   -ling   – Ø (sibling)

N, f sib   – person MASC.NOM.SG.

hús   -scipe   – Ø (family)

N, m hús – collective MASC.NOM.SG.

erfe   -weard − Ø (heir)

N, n erfe   − person MASC.NOM.SG.

Social Stratification

ealdor   -scipe   − Ø (aldermanship)

N, m ealdor − collective MASC.NOM.SG.

weorold   -hád   − Ø (secular)

N, f weorold − person MASC.NOM.SG.

níd   -ling   − Ø (slave)

N, f níd − person MASC.NOM.SG.

Age

cniht   -hád− Ø (youth)

N, m cniht   − state MASC.NOM.SG.

The suffix -sǽta is the least productive of all masculine suffixes in Old English and at the same time it coined nouns belonging to only one semantic group. The etymology of the suffix defines its semantic meaning. The suffix is from Proto-Indo-European *sed- (to sit), later it developed into a noun sǽta with the meaning "a dweller". Thus, we have two sets of bases, which the suffix used to coin new words, 1) a place or structure to live in and 2) an object that is connected with the process of sitting.

Notions of Humans (8 cases)

cot -sǽta   − Ø (cottage dweller)

N, n cot − person MASC.NOM.SG.

Two suffixes having their own semantic peculiarities stand aside from others. One of them is −els. The semantic meaning of the suffix is explained by the fact that it works with bases that are either verbs and, thus forming instruments of the process, or lifeless objects, thus specifying their usage or meaning. Hence, it is a concrete object suffix in general presented as:

Lifeless Objects

mirc   -els   − Ø (mark)

V, w1 mercian − result MASC.NOM.SG

The second suffix is −cræft, which is an example of a suffix formed from a noun and thus saving its semantic content. It is from Proto-Indo-European *greþ- "hook, power". Semantic group Skills and Knowledge includes more than two-thirds of the overall number of its derivatives. Other semantic groups attested for the suffix also include Skills/Power in their meaning. It should be mentioned that bases used with this suffix belong to 15 different semantic groups emphasizing the fact that skills can be applied to different spheres of life.

Skills/knowledge

lǽce -cræft − Ø (medicine)

N, m lǽce − skills MASC.NOM.SG.;

Abstraction

 ellen -cræft   − Ø (power)

N, m ellen − abstraction MASC.NOM.SG.;

War

gúþ   -cræft   − Ø (war)

N, f gúþ − abstraction MASC.NOM.SG.

Abstraction is another significant semantic component for Old English masculine suffixes. Coined nouns may denote abstract notions connected with specific meanings of each suffix, that is religion, skillfulness, etc. There are semantic groups that only some suffixes can work with, e.g., : Emotions and Feelings, State and

Results, Structures and *Locations*. It is also worth mentioning that masculine suffixes do not show the possibility to name *Activities, Animals* and *Food*. Thus, certain semantic restrictions on masculine affixation are attested in the Old English. Bases used to coin masculine nouns in the Old English period are numerous and belong to the following groups: *Abstractions, Traits of Character, Social Stratification, Administration, Skills, etc.*

4.2. Feminine Suffixes

The scope of feminine derivatives in Old English was also analyzed and the corresponding peculiarities for feminine suffixes of the period were established. In the Old English period, feminine was the most productive gender in terms of word-formation. The suffix *–ung*, in its turn, was one of the most productive suffixes used to form nouns (feminine gender) from verbs (200 verbal bases were fixed), substantival bases (110 derivatives in Old English), adjectives (34 cases) and other parts of speech (adverbs, prepositions etc.). The second suffix, in terms of productiveness was *–ness*. The bases that were used for this suffix were different in terms of the prevailing part of speech (adjectives instead of verbs): *Activities, Feelings, Traits of Character*. As a result, for the two most productive suffixes the most frequent semantic meaning of bases was *Activity*. But, in general, all analyzed feminine derivatives were coined from nouns of all three genders, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and other parts of speech.

It can be stated that each feminine suffix, besides having a number of semantic meanings also conveyed a certain focal meaning (see Figure 2). This focal meaning sometimes added additional shades of meaning and depended upon the peculiarities and etymology of the suffix. Other domains of usage could be distinguished as secondary being still vital for the understanding of the meaning of each suffix in general. The results indicate that majority of suffixes would reveal $3 - 5$ semantic meanings with at least 2 primary ones, while a limited number of suffixes bring about $7 - 9$ segments.

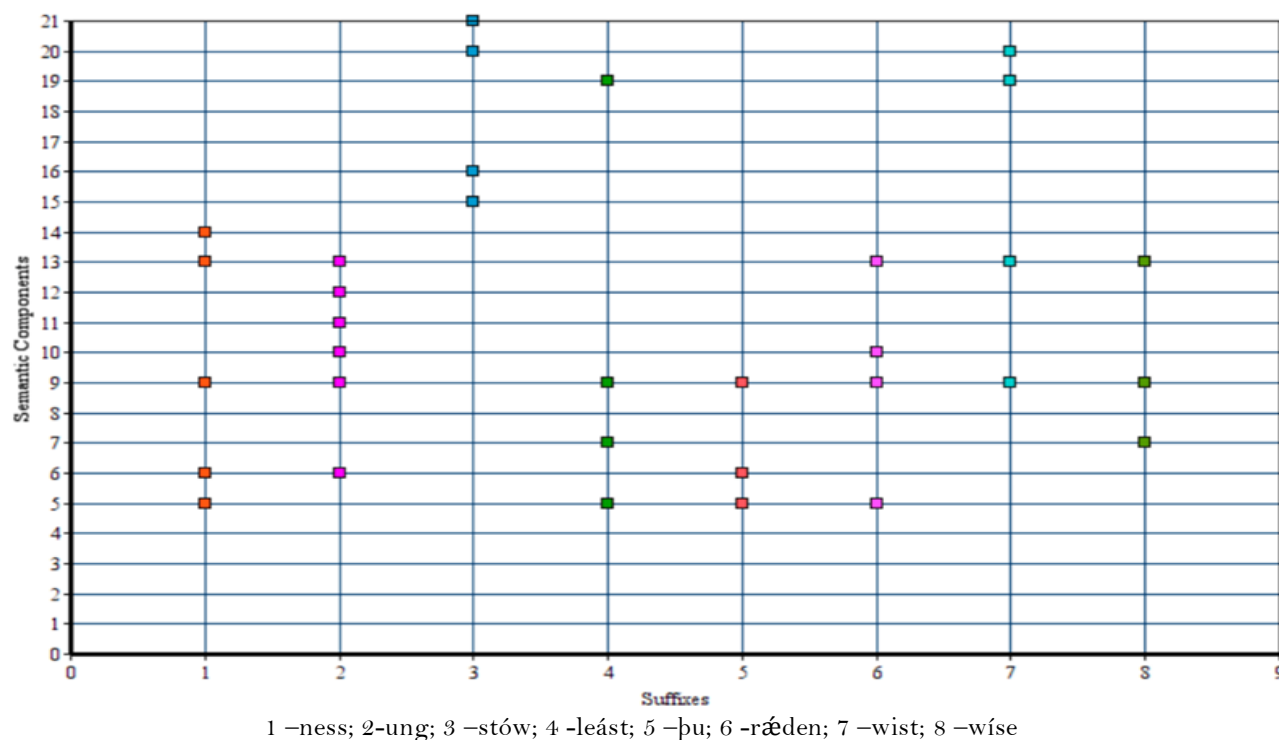1 –ness; 2-ung; 3 –stów; 4 -leást; 5 –þu; 6 -rǽden; 7 –wist; 8 –wíse
Figure-2. Feminine Suffix Semantization (Semantic Groups 5, 6, 9, 13).

Abstractions group is the leader in terms of feminine suffixes coinage productivity. No lesser important are *Feelings, Traits of Character, Result of Actions*. Secondary semantic components like *Social Activities* and *Physical*

Activities reveal the recurrent use of verbal bases for feminine suffixes. The following examples will exemplify the derivation of feminine nouns of the above-mentioned semantic groups in the old English period:

Abstractions

riht -wīse – Ø (justice)

Adj. riht – state FEM.NOM.SG.;

ár -leást – Ø (dishonour)

N, f ár – lack   FEM.NOM.SG.

Feelings

wrǽþ -þu   – Ø (anger)

N, f wrǽþ – abstraction FEM.NOM.SG.;

  bolgen -ness – Ø (irritation)

Adj. bolgen – feelings FEM.NOM.SG.

Traits of Character

beald -ness   – Ø (boldness)

Adj. beald – character FEM.NOM.SG.;

réce -leást – Ø (carelessness)

V, w1 récan – lack   FEM.NOM.SG.

Result of Actions

cwid -rǽden – Ø (agreement)

N, m cwild – state   FEM.NOM.SG.

Social Activities

hǽlet -oþ   – Ø (greeting)

V, w1 hálettan – process NEUT.NOM.SG.;

þing -rǽden – Ø (advocacy)

N, n þing – process FEM.NOM.SG.

Physical Activities

far -oþ   – Ø (motion)

V, s6 faran – *process* NEUT.NOM.SG.

There were a few other semantic restrictions on feminine suffixation that we came across namely: *Notions of Humans*, *Administration*, *Social Stratification*, *Lifeless Objects* and *Animals*, which were not attested in our research as semantic groups as they showed significant correlation with feminine suffixes. The bases used to coin feminine nouns denoted *Activities*, *Abstractions*, *Lifeless Objects* and *Results of Actions*.

4.3. Neuter Suffixes

The final group of suffixes showing the lowest productivity in Old English coin nouns belonged to neuter gender. We analyzed 6 suffixes and the results of the investigation are summarized in Figure 3.

Two of the suffixes coined more than 20 nouns each, others being responsible for approximately ten nouns each. The amount of data was negligible, but even with those numbers, certain peculiarities of neuter suffixes could be claimed. It was observed that in terms of semantic meaning the group was subdivided into 4 suffixes (*-incel; -cen; -ríce; -bǽre*), suffix *-lác* and suffix *-oþ*. First of all, the group of suffixes shared the following primary semantic groups: *Structures*, *Locations*, *Lifeless Objects*. These segments were significant in terms of a number of derivatives and a number of suffixes that could coin them.
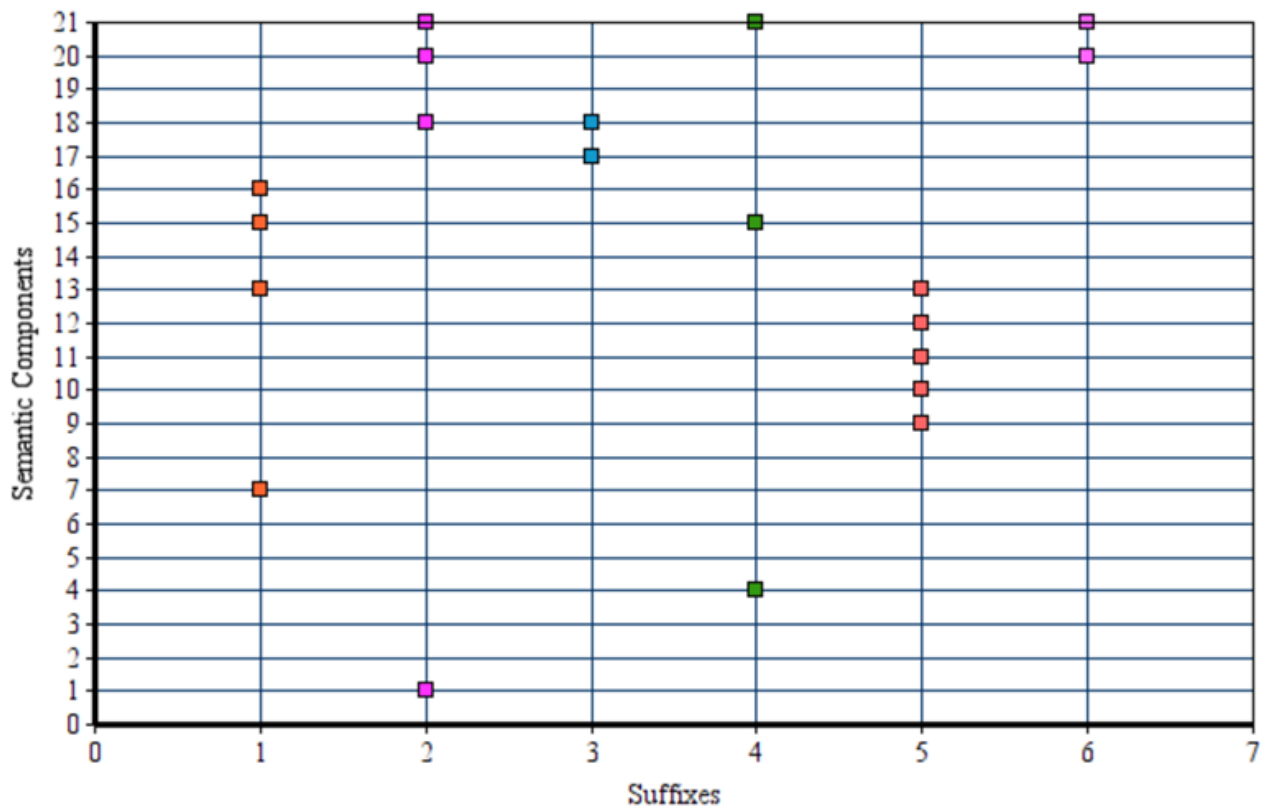
1 −lác; 2 −incel; 3-cen; 4 −ríce; 5 -oþ; 6 -bǽre

Figure-3. Neuter Suffix Semantization (Semantic Groups 13, 18, 20, 21).

Structures

den   -bǽre   − Ø (den)

N, n denn − location NEUT.NOM.SG.;

hús   -incel   − Ø (small house)

N, m hús − diminutive NEUT.NOM.SG.

Locations

weald   -bǽre   − Ø (region)

N, m weald − location NEUT.NOM.SG.;

land   -ríce   − Ø (region)

N, n land − location NEUT.NOM.SG.

Lifeless Objects

ráp   -incel   − Ø (rope)

N, m ráp − diminutive NEUT.NOM.SG.;

tyn   -ce   − Ø (a small barrel)

V, w týn − diminutive NEUT.NOM.SG.

As secondary semantic groups *Religion* and *Result of Actions* were singled out.

With regard to the suffixes whose semantic peculiarities differed, the defining factors were their etymology and bases of derivatives. For instance, the Old English noun suffix *-lác* denoted "activity or process of, gift" according to the dictionary definition. Substantival and adjectival bases denoted *Family, Result of Actions, Religion, Social Stratification, Abstractions, War* etc. This allowed the suffix *-lác* to form nouns of different semantic groups, thus, its *resultative* meaning became vivid in derived nouns denoting *Religion, War* and *Skills.*

Another Old English suffix *-oþ* comes from Germanic **-þuz* which was used to form nouns from verbs. In the Old English period the suffix was used to coin neuter nouns from verbs and adjectives. This is the only neuter suffix that coined words from verbs and therefore its semantic content was very similar to that of the feminine suffix *−ung*, in comparison with other neuter suffixes. Semantic groups of *Social Stratification, Family, Traits of Character, Feelings,* and *Age* were not characteristic of neuter suffixes in Old English. Although some semantic groups were not significantly represented in the structure of any suffix, they were treated as minor for the discussed suffixes and gender assignment in the Old English period. In general, they contained certain suffixes that belonged to these semantic groups in their meaning structure: *Skills and Knowledge* (*-leást /-lác/-dóm/-wise/-cræft*), *Activities* (*-ung/-rǽden/-oþ/-least*), *State* (*-ness/-scipe*), *Religion* (*-dóm/-hád/-lác/-stów/-rice*), *War* (*-weard /-stów /-lác*), *Animals* (*-cen*) and *Food* (*-wist/-leást*).

5. CONCLUSION

The investigation of noun derivation in Old English has yielded a number of interesting results. First, in the Old English period, the most productive gender in terms of formation was feminine, followed by masculine nouns and then neuter derivatives. Though the number of suffixes under analysis was almost the same for all three genders. All established derivatives were coined from nouns of all three genders, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and other parts of speech (prepositions, pronouns). It was difficult to identify any connection between bases and further assignment of gender or meaning of coined words.

Though some general conclusions about bases were made. Due to the productivity of the suffix *−ung* the most frequent semantic groups of bases were found to be *Social, Physiological* and *Physical Activities*. Other vital semantic groups of bases found included *Abstractions, Locations, Social Stratification, Result of Actions* and *Age*. It was noted that some semantic groups could be formed only from bases belonging to the same group: *Age, Animals, and Physiological Activities*. Other segments were formed from various bases triggering the transition from concrete to abstract or from human to skills or activities. Thus, it can be concluded that the gender of derivatives is in the first place influenced by the suffix and its meaning.

It can also be stated that each suffix though having a number of realized semantic components had a certain focal meaning. This focal meaning sometimes presented additional aspects and depended upon the gender and etymology of the suffix. The results indicate that majority of masculine and feminine suffixes were responsible for nouns belonging to $3-5$ semantic groups, with a limited number of suffixes working with $7-9$ groups or $1-2$; neuter suffixes have from 2 to 4 semantic meanings. It was also possible to divide suffixes according to their primary meaning and additional semantic content.

Hence all Old English suffixes fall into two categories: one including suffixes with unique meanings and the other that encompasses suffixes that have their semantic competitors. Suffixes with unique meaning are *-least* (with privative content for abstractions, traits of character, substances/food), and *-els* (used to create concrete nouns, lifeless objects). Suffixes with common additional aspects of certain semantic content are the following: diminutives *-incel* (locations and structures) and *-cen* (objects, people, animals); location suffixes *-bǽre* (locations and structures), *-stów* (religion and war) and *-ríce* (administration, church and places); person suffixes *-ling* (notions of humans, social stratification, family, age), *-sǽta* (dweller) and *-weard* (function); stative suffixes *-hád* (religious and anthropocentric) and *-wíse* (abstractions, skills, result); resultative suffixes *-lác* (religion, war and skills) and *-rǽden* (abstraction/anthropocentric); action suffixes *-ung* and *-oþ* (very much alike); and the most numerous group of abstraction suffixes **-*wist*** (existence), **-*ness*** (anthropocentric, result, state), *-scipe* (collective), *-cræft* (skills/knowledge), *-dóm* (power-oriented) and **-*þu*** (high level of abstraction).

Further generalization allowed making the conclusion about the correlation between semantic groups and the gender of nouns. Thus, masculine suffixes *(-ling, -hád, -sǽta, -cræft, -dóm, -weard, -scipe, -els)* were grouped under the general heading *People* with primary semantic groups *Humans, Social Stratification, Family,* and *Administration* and

secondary group *Age*. This peculiarity would be even more vivid if we added suffixes denoting performers of an action indicated by the root verb. It is also worth mentioning that masculine suffixes did not show the possibility to name *Activities, Animals* and *Food*.

Semantic groups characteristic of certain sets of feminine suffixes in the Old English period are established, with *Abstractions* being the leader in terms of its coinage productivity. The importance of *Abstractions* appearing in the language can be proven by the fact that 12 out of all suffixes have this semantic component. No less important are *Feelings, Traits of Character, Result of Actions* as well as secondary semantic components like *Social Activities* and *Physical Activities*; they reveal the recurrent use of verbal bases for feminine suffixes. Feminine suffixes were not attested in our research for semantic groups *Notions of Humans, Administration, Social Stratification, Lifeless Objects* and *Animals*.

Finally, primary groups for neuter suffixes are found to be *Structures, Locations, Lifeless Objects*, and secondary groups included − *Religion* and *Result of Actions*. Semantic groups defined as significant in terms of masculine and feminine suffixes (*Social Stratification, Family, Traits of Character, Feelings*, and *Age*) are not characteristic of neuter suffixes in Old English. Some semantic groups were not significantly represented in the structure of any group of suffixes; thus, they were treated as minor for the correlation between discussed suffixes and gender assignment in the Old English period.

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