

The Status of Affixes and the New Words by *-ment* in Present-Day English

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1 Introduction: The Status of Affixes

Contemporary discourse on the status of derivational affixes is fraught with controversy; are they functional or lexical morphemes? Creemers et al. (2018) summarized recent studies and point out that some scholars have argued that all derivational affixes are functional morphemes while others have argued that they are lexical morphemes (or roots). Another argument has emerged between these two views. Creemers et al. (2018) argue that some affixes are functional and others are lexical. These arguments assume that a given affix is exclusively functional or lexical. In contrast, Emonds' (2000) syntactic theory of morphology, which hypothesizes that the lexicon consists of Syntacticon and Dictionary, states that a single derivational affix may behave as a functional morpheme in some cases and a lexical morpheme in others.

This study aims to examine the status of derivational affixes based on newly found empirical data of *-ment* retrieved from the *Oxford English Dictionary Online (OED)*. More precisely, this study argues that among the several views on the status of affixes, Emonds' (2000) hypothesis is the most promising. Section 2 presents the results of my *OED*-based survey and details the relevant data. The data are analyzed in Section 3 on the basis of Emonds' (2000) hypothesis. Section 4 summarizes the findings and outlines a conclusion.

2 Problematic Behaviors of *-ment* in Present-Day English

The suffix *-ment* is often described as unproductive in present-day English (PDE) but is still available (Marchand 1969: §4.65.1; Bauer et al. 2013: §10.2.1.1). However, previous studies have not sufficiently analyzed its use and creative aspects in PDE; thus, *-ment* in PDE can be expected to provide a new perspective on the discussion of the status of suffixes.

Using the *OED*'s advanced search function, I retrieved 23 *-ment* nouns that were first recorded after 1900. These nouns can be classified according to their origins of the base words and their syntactic categories, as shown in Table 1. Each example is followed by the date of the first attestation in the *OED*. Nouns in the square and those in the circle in Table 1 are of the greatest interest to this study.

		Romance Base		Non-Romance Base	
Verbal Base		excystment (1928)	bemusement (1907)	embrittlement (1921)	weldment (1945)
		piercement (1925)	reforestment (1921)	encirclement (1919)	soothment (1900)
		perturbment (1901)	superencipherment (1940)	upliftment (1926)	staggerment (1933)
				underlayment (1956)	
				centrement (1975)	motherment (1914)
				munitionment (1915)	stakement (1904)
Non-verbal Base		foolishment (1918)	curettement (1908)		
			encoppicement (1935)		
			memberment (1904)		
			scholarment (1922)		
				bashment (1996)	
		<u>A + -ment</u>	<u>N + -ment</u>		

Converted Words + *-ment*

Table 1. Classification of *-ment* Nouns Recorded after 1900

2.1 Problem 1: Categorical Selection

Functional morphemes are generally sensitive to the categorial properties of their selected elements, as shown in the alignments C-T-v-V and D-N. In fact, *-ment* primarily selects verbs and changes them into nouns. However, *-ment* in the examples in (1), which are also presented in the square in Table 1, departs from this derivative pattern in that it attaches to adjectives and nouns.

- (1) a. A + *-ment*: *foolishment* ‘foolishness’
b. N + *-ment*: *bashment*₂, *curettement*, *encoppicement*, *memberment*, *scholarment*

Previous studies have reported that *-ment* can attach to certain nouns (e.g., *devilment*, *illusionment*) and adjectives (e.g., *merriment*, *embeddedment*, *insensiblement*) (Bauer et al. 2013: 198); however, these cases are few and may be regarded as exceptions. The situation is different in PDE; the nouns in (1) cannot be dismissed as trivial because they account for 26% of new *-ment* nouns. Moreover, given that the derivative pattern of *-ment* “seems to have been stabilized after 1450” (Marchand 1969: 331), *-ment* should strictly follow this pattern in PDE. However, it can still attach to adjectives and nouns. Accordingly, the examples in (1) problematize the argument that *-ment* is a functional morpheme.

2.2 Problem 2: Myers’ Generalization

The suffix *-ment* attaches to converted (or zero-derived) nouns and adjectives in (2), which are presented in the circle in Table 1.

- (2) a. Denominal Verb + *-ment*: *centrement*, *motherment*, *munitonment*, *stakement*
b. Deverbal Noun + *-ment*: *bashment*₂

In *motherment*, ‘motherly care or supervision, mothering,’ for example, the noun *mother* undergoes N-to-V conversion, and the resultant verb is combined with *-ment*, as in (3).

- (3) $mother_N > \boxed{\text{N-to-V Conversion}} > mother_V > \boxed{\text{-ment suffixation}} > mother\text{-ment}$

This type of word-formation process conflicts with Myers’ Generalization, which states that “no derivational suffix may be added to a zero-derived word” (Myers 1984: 66). For example, adding *-ant* to denominal converted verbs is not allowed as in *[[[*experiment*]_N]_V -*ant*]_N (see Nagano 2008: 17). Nagano (2008: 16–18) points out that Myer’s Generalization has three exceptional suffixes: *-er*, *-ing*, and *-able*, which are known as highly productive suffixes (e.g., *documenter*, *documenting*, *documentable*). However, *-ment* is not considered an exception. Thus, if *-ment* is a derivational suffix, the nouns in (2) are problematic to this generalization.

3 Analysis

The two problems described above seem unrelated, but they follow one assumption that is naturally derived from Emonds’ (2000) hypothesis.

3.1 Theoretical Background

Emonds (2000) hypothesizes that affixes exhibit the dual nature in principle; not only can they behave as functional morphemes, but they can be used in the same manner as lexical morphemes as well. This hypothesis successfully captures the fact that suffixes such as *-ation* and *-ment* can form two types of deverbal nominals known as complex event nominals (CENs) and result nominals (RNs) in Grimshaw’s (1990) terms. CENs function similarly to verbs in that they inherit argument structures of base verbs as illustrated in (4a), and RNs can be regarded as genuine nouns in that they prototypically refer to physical objects and can be pluralized as shown in (4b).

- (4) a. The assignment of that problem too early in the course always causes problems.
b. The assignments were too long.

(Grimshaw 1990: 54; underlining mine)

In Emonds' (2000: §4.6) analysis, *-ment* in (4a) is a functional morpheme, whereas in (4b), it behaves in the same manner as nouns. He hypothesizes that functional morphemes—not lexical ones—undergo lexical insertion after syntactic computation and that prior to lexical insertion, functional morphemes are inert (Emonds 2000: 115). In the underlined expression in (4a), the nominal suffix *-ment* is inactive, and the verb *assign* is substantially a head in syntactic computation. Consequently, *assign* can introduce the argument *that problem*. In this case, *-ment* simply transforms a verb into a noun as a functional morpheme. In (4b), *-ment* undergoes lexical insertion at the beginning of syntactic derivation along with lexical morphemes. Accordingly, *-ment* is active as a nominal head throughout the derivation; thus, *assignment* behaves as a genuine noun.

Naya (2016) clarifies the categorial status of *-ment* in (4b), which is inserted at the beginning of syntactic derivation. He argues that the suffix as used in RNs is a lexical morpheme meaning 'thing / entity.' The noun *assignment* in (4b) thus means 'thing that is assigned.' In this example, the verb *assign* modifies the head *-ment*. If *-ment* in (4b) is a lexical morpheme, *assignment* in (4b) is formed by combining two lexical morphemes. This process is equivalent to compounding.

Emonds' (2000) hypothesis indicates the possibility that a single affix can behave as a functional morpheme in some aspects and a lexical morpheme in others. The next subsection demonstrates that this hypothesis is useful in understanding the behaviors of *-ment* in PDE.

3.2 Proposal

I propose that *-ment* in (1) and (2) is a lexical—rather than functional—morpheme. The nouns in (1) and (2) are formed through root compounding, and they have the same status as the RN in (4b). This proposal naturally accounts for the unconventional behaviors of *-ment* in PDE. First, *-ment* attaches to other than verbs in (1). Unlike derivation, compounding does not impose categorial restrictions on its input elements. For example, the noun *man* can be combined with a verb (e.g., *wash man*), noun (e.g., *sandwich man*), and adjective (e.g., *merry man*). Thus, if *-ment* is a lexical morpheme, it can participate in compounding and attach to any word, including nouns and adjectives. Second, *-ment* attaches to converted words in (2). Recall that Myers' Generalization is concerned with *derivational* suffixes. If *-ment* is used as a *lexical* morpheme, it is not subject to this restriction, and it can attach to converted words. Thus, the behaviors of *-ment* in PDE are explicable.

Note that I do not argue that *-ment* always behaves as a lexical morpheme in PDE. As shown in (4a), *-ment* can also behave as a functional morpheme bearing a category-changing function from V to N. That is, it has a dual nature. This property can be naturally captured under Emonds' (2000) view on the status of affixes without extra assumptions. If we assume that *-ment* is always a functional morpheme, its ability to attach to nouns, adjectives, and converted words is not easily explainable. If we consider that *-ment* is exclusively a lexical morpheme, we overlook its category-changing function. The data presented in this study must be investigated with a hypothesis that allows the suffix flexibility as that proposed in Emonds (2000).

3.3 Supporting Evidence

If the nouns in (1) and (2) are compounds, the nouns containing verbal bases should behave in the same way as RNs. Unlike CENs, RNs cannot co-occur with the arguments of the verbs

used therein. For example, the RN *assignment(s)* in (4b) cannot be accompanied by *the problems*, which corresponds to the object of the verb *assign*:

(5) * *The assignments of the problems took a long time.* (Grimshaw 1990: 54)

This property can be observed in V-N combinations like *tax man*, which cannot co-occur with the argument of *tax*, as in **a tax man of hidden assets* (cf. *to tax hidden assets*) (Roeper 1987: 268). If the proposed analysis is correct, we can predict that the nouns in (2) that contain a verbal base are RNs and cannot co-occur with the objects of the verbs. This prediction is borne out as shown in (6) (I excluded *stakement* because this is a historical technical term).

(6) a. *The computer's {*centrement / centering} of all sentences in the paper took a long time.*

b. *Her constant {*motherment / mothering} of my children was very helpful.*

c. *The defense industry's {*munitionment / munitioning} of the forces took a long time.*

For example, *centrement* in (6a) is not compatible with *all sentences in the paper*, which corresponds to the object of the verb *centre* (cf. *to centre all sentences in the paper*). The ungrammaticality of the *-ment* nouns in (6) indicates that the nouns are RNs formed by root compounding, which supports the proposal that *-ment* is a lexical morpheme in (6). In contrast to *-ment*, the highly productive suffix *-ing*, an exception to Meyers' Generalization, can successfully derive impeccable CENs from the relevant verbs. That is, the verbs can transform into CENs through derivation by their nature. This fact also shows that the ungrammaticality in (6) should be attributed to the nature of *-ment* as a lexical morpheme.

4 Summary

Emonds' (2000) approach to affixes differs from other approaches in that his hypothesis allows a single affix to behave as both a functional and lexical morpheme. This hypothesis is useful in analyzing the behaviors of *-ment* in PDE. While the suffix is a purely functional in category changing, it behaves non-canonically in new PDE words: it can attach to adjectives, nouns, and converted words. This property is not surprising if we assume that *-ment* can function as a lexical morpheme and be used in compound formation. Emonds' (2000) view successfully explains the otherwise unexpected behaviors of *-ment*, which demonstrates the dual status of an affix.

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