Meaning construction and secondary lexical functions. The formation of Old English nouns and adjectives

This paper focuses on the topic of Old English word-formation, with special emphasis on the derivation of nouns and adjectives and the meaning conveyed by the derivational processes of prefixation and suffixification. Given this topic, this paper seeks to answer two questions. Firstly, to decide whether, in the context of Old English word-formation, the distinction between primary and secondary lexical functions made by Pounder (2000), after Mel’čuk (1996, 2006), is relevant for the study of meaning construction. For this author (Pounder 2000: 109), primary functions are present in almost every derived predicate, whereas secondary functions are used in combination with primary ones and include POS('X'), involving a positive evaluation of the affix with respect to the base of the word; PEJ('X'), affecting the base negatively; INTENS('X'), providing the meaning of the base with a certain intensity; and AUGM('X'), meaning increase. The second question addressed by this paper is what the possible combinations of primary and secondary lexical functions are. The data of analysis, which have been drawn from the lexical database of Old English Nerthus (www.nerthusproject.com), comprise around 380 recursive adjectives and 270 recursive nouns (types), out of the 3,356 affixed adjectives and 4,834 affixed nouns filed by the database. Each recursive derivative is analyzed as to the lexical function assigned to the base of derivation and the one assigned to the recursive derivative. For instance, unslēpig ‘sleepless’ results from the assignment of the lexical function WITHPROP('X') (with property), realized by the suffix -īg, to the base of derivation slēpan ‘sleep’ and the assignment of the lexical function OPP('X') (oppositional), realized by the prefix un-, to the base of derivation slēpig, thus slēpan > slēpig > unslēpig. Given that two lexical categories are considered, a part of the analysis is devoted to the points of convergence and divergence between the assignment of lexical functions in nouns and adjectives. The conclusion is reached that the distinction between primary and secondary lexical functions, as made by Pounder, has to be reconsidered, in such a way that it is motivated by recursivity. That is, secondary lexical functions are those that are assigned after primary functions in recursive formations. Another conclusion of this study is that the inventory of secondary lexical functions must be enlarged to include, at least, property (WITHPROP('X')), oppositional (OPP('X')) and relation (REL('X')). Finally, the conclusion is also drawn that REL('X') - OPP('X') and WITHPROP('X') - OPP('X') outstand among the most frequent combinations of primary plus secondary lexical function.

References