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Investigating Suffixal Rivalry in Written Educated Nigerian English: A Cognitive Morphology Approach

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Abstract
This paper investigates the interpretation and use of rival suffixes in English noun and adjective formation in written educated Nigerian English. The Cognitive Morphology approach was used in analysing data purposively selected from four discourse contexts labelled written academic, media, religious and scientific discourse. One hundred and fifty-nine nominal and adjectival words derived from same nominal, verbal and adjectival roots were isolated from the corpus studied and analysed for their (in) appropriate use in the context in which they occurred. The findings indicated that derivatives in *–ent* recorded the highest frequency of occurrence: 56 instances representing (35.2%) while those in *–ant* recorded the second highest instances of occurrence of 28 instances (17.6%). The rival morpheme which recorded the lowest instance of occurrence is the *–ing* suffix with 4 representing (2.5%). Further findings from the study surfaced from the fact that the subjects studied did not take into consideration, The semantic value of derivational suffixes while choosing the suffixes appended to roots to derive composite morphological expressions. The indiscriminate attachment of the *–ent* suffix to equally indiscriminate roots/bases can be accounted for by the fact that subjects may possess knowledge of derivation as a concanetive process, but lack knowledge of its semantic aspect.
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1. Introduction

The term rivalry in the Cognitive Morphology framework refers to the competition which ensues between two or more morphemes to express a language user's different conceptualizations of a particular situation (Hamawand, 2011). This concept is rooted in the view of language as a means by which language users understand, interprete events in the external-world and express their understanding and interpretation by use of linguistic (morphological) units. (Tuggy, 2005, Hamawand, 2007, 2008). Within the Cognitive Morphology framework, the linguistic units available for use in this capacity are affixes, bound morphemes that are appended to a root/base to derive another word with a new meaning. This function surfaces in derivation, a word formation process which involves integration. Integration is the process of appending a bound morpheme (an affix) to a root/base to create another word. For example, the bound morphemes *–ness* and *–ity* can be appended to the same adjectival root, for example, crude to create the nominal pairs crude*ness* and crud*ity*. The two bound morphemes are described as rivals. Even though they attach to the same morphological host, each conveys a different message: the suffix *-ness* specifies trait, the nature of an entity whereas *-ity* describes mode, the manner of an entity (Hamawand, 2011, p.178). The derivatives crudeness and crudity are not synonymous neither are they to be used interchangeably. (ibid).

Rival morphemes are considered to be very important in derivation. Even though they are generally incapable of independent existence they are held to possess semantic value and are capable of "redirecting" the meaning of their hosts. Within the Cognitive Morphology framework, rival morphemes are considered to be the locus of the meaning difference of derivatives.

Rivalry relates to integration, a concanetive process of creating other words from existing ones. It activates derivation, a word formation process whereby smaller morphological units referred to as affixes are attached to roots/bases to derive composite or complex words. The smaller linguistic elements of which composite morphological structures are built are generally described as "minimal meaningful units…" They are said to be minimal because they cannot be further broken down into smaller units. Both free and bound morphemes share the characteristic of indivisibility. According to Haspelmath and Sims (2010), free and bound morphemes are primitive morphological units. Morphemes are also said to be meaningful. From the viewpoint of Cognitive Morphology, they bear this feature because they are hold to represent something in the mind of a language user. Each morpheme contributes to the overall meaning of a derived word because each morpheme is linked to a

specific "conceptual representation in the (LU's) Mind" (Hamawand, 2011). Thus, whether it be a free morpheme or a bound one, it has a semantic value (c.f. Hamawand, 2011).

1.1 The Nature and Behaviour of Rival Morphemes

Rivalry commonly involves rival morphemes (bound morphemes). They are the competitors in the process of conveying the language user's perspective on the content (meaning) borne by the root/base to which it is appended. They are expressive, that is, they convey specific meanings related to their host (Langacker 1991, Hamawand, 2011 Plag and Baayen, 2009). Their presence add semantic import to the morphological expressions in which they occur: their integration to a host modifies the meaning (content) of the root. Rival morphemes can be prefixes or suffixes. Our attention in this study is the derivational suffixes which occur as subparts in the building of nominal and adjectival word pairs.

Rival morphemes sometimes attach to same roots/bases or occur in the same position – that is as prefixes or suffixes. The rival morphemes *non-* and *ir-* for example can be appended to the base rational to form the derivatives *nonrational* and *irrational.* Nonetheless, each rival morpheme modifies the meaning of each derivative differently. Rival morphemes are not in free variation: they may occur in the same environment but they have their distinct meaning. They are also not in complementary distribution.

According to Hamawand (2011, p.6); "[They] cannot occur in the same environment without signalling any change in meaning". It is the nature of rival morphemes to cause a change in the meaning of the root/base to which it is integrated. (cf Nordquist 2023, Manova 2011). This nature is activated by construal. In the sub-section following, the concept construal is explicated.

1.2 Construal: A Cognitive Morphology Operation.

Within the cognitive morphology framework, construal refers to the way(s) in which a language user conceives a particular situation, interpretes its meaning and codes it using language (cf. Hall, 1991, Nordquist, 2023). In the tradition of cognitive Grammar, word formation is held to be a mental process, and derivatives, products of the processes of the brain. Hamawand states that:

> [construal] is a mental operation which allows the speaker to conceptualize a situation in different ways and choose the appropriate affixes to represent them in discourse (p.198).

Form the foregoing, it is apparent that lexical choice is not done in random fashion: it is a linguistically conscious activity given that every word has its meaning specified in the lexicon, and it is a rival morpheme which gives a root its meaning. The root has conceptual content which is multifacted. Each derived member of a word pair, for example, *significant* and *significance*, represents a different experience of the LU which he frames into a morphological form by means of a specific rival morpheme. The choice of a rival morpheme is determined by the construal imposed on a root.

Cognitive Morphology posits a dimension of construal referred to in the literature as perspective, a language user's viewpoint imposed on a particular situation or event. This viewpoint is dynamic: it changes according to the language user's intention or the demands of the relevant discourse. Thus, each verbal, nominal or adjectival derivative has its own meaning profiled by the root plus the specific rival morpheme appended to it. Each rival morpheme is not just an addition to a root but functions to describe a particular aspect of the root's meaning. To illustrate this point, consider the adjectives child*like* and child*ish.* The two words are derived from same nominal root *child* but they profile different meanings and uses. The meaning difference is activated by the perspective imposed on the root and the language user's viewpoint is represented by the rival morphemes *–like* and *–ish.* If a language user chooses the derivative in *–ish,* the referent is thus described as immature, irrational and impatient. On the other hand, the derivative in *–like* describes the referent as honest, fresh and innocent. Thus form alternation results in meaning alternation. Construal therefore exerts on the interpretation of lexical items.

It has been observed however that except for L1 speakers of English and to some extent, L2 and foreign speakers who are appropriately educated in the English language, most Nigerian L2 speakers of English are ignorant of the semantic value of English derivational suffixes. Earlier studies (eg. Jowit, 1991, Alo and Mesthrie, 2008 etc.) have shown that lexical choices made by most Nigerian L2 users of English exhibit deviant lexical usages indicating a lack of morphological competence. The presence study investigates educated Nigerians' lexical choice in four discourse domains. This was aimed at determining their knowledge of English suffixal rivalry in their choice and use of nominal and adjectival word pairs. Noun – and Adjective –forming suffixes are shown in table 1.

Table 1: The Semantic Distinction Signalled by S8uffixes

Construal			
Nominal Suffixes		**Adjectives Suffixes**	
Distinctions	**Representatives**	**Distinctions**	**Representative**
Sequential vs. whole	-al vs. -ion	Agentive vs. patientive	-ivel-ory vs. -ablel-ible
Instance vs. type	-ce vs. -ment	Self vs. other imposed	-ive vs. -ory
State vs. status	-ce vs. -cy	narrow vs. broad	-able vs. -ed
Trait vs. mode	-ness vs. -ity	cause vs. effect	-ing vs. -ed
Traits vs existent	-ness vs. -ity	ordinary vs. technical	-ive vs. -ant
Territory vs position	-dom vs. -ship	vice vs. virtue	-ous vs. -some
Condition vs position	-hood vs. -ship	circumspect vs. imprudent	-ish vs. -some
Specific vs generic	-ant vs. –er	Essential vs. peripheral	-al vs. -ary
Potential vs actual	Er vs. –ee	Hallmark vs. speciality	-ic vs. -ical
Inventive vs implementive	-ist vs. –ian	Substance vs. feature	-en vs. -y

The Table Above was adapted from Hamawand, 2011, p. 199

2. Methodology

2.1 Data Collection Procedure

Data for this investigation were obtained using the corpus-based method from four (loosely specified domains of written discourse labelled academic discourse, media discourse, religious discourse and science discourse. This is based on the assumption that the writers of the discourse texts studied are educated Nigerian L2 users of English who have had a long- enough exposure to the English language given that English is Nigeria's official language. Adesanye's (1973) variety III classification was applied. Speakers of the variety are associated with University education, holders of the NCE certificate and secondary school leavers. Since attention in the present investigation is to Nigerian LUs' lexical choice, the words isolated from the corpus for analysis were nominal and adjectival derivatives. The data featured repeated nominal and adjectival word pairs both in same discourse texts and across discourse domains. The word pairs of which our data comprised were analysed morphologically and semantically using the principles of Cognitive Morphology.

2.2 Analytical Procedure

The morphological competence of educated Nigerian- English bilinguals as demonstrated in their written output in the corpus studied was examined. Both the chosen word pairs and the combinatory potential of the rival suffixes with their respective roots/bases were analysed using the Construal Theory of word formation in Cognitive Morphology which posits that derivational morphemes are employed by a language user to represent the different ways in which a particular situation in the external world is conceived. According to Hamawand's (2011) cognitive morphology construal theory combines insights from cognitive grammar devised by Langacker (1991). It provides new perspectives on word structure emphasizing form- meaning relationships between the constituents of a composite word and demonstrates how word parts – prefixes,

suffixes and roots – are integrated in affixation and how the derivatives are interpreted. Cognitive Morphology provides fresh insights into the structure of composite words and demonstrates the crucial function of bound morphemes in word formation. It thereby equips the language user (especially in non-native environment like ours in Nigeria) with requisite skills to expand their lexical store and be able to make appropriate lexical choices to satisfy communicative demands. The Construal Theory is therefore suitable to be adopted for analysing Nigerian-English speakers performance in their use of composite morphological formations.

3. Presentation of Data

As stated in 2.1, data for the study were obtained using a corpus-based method. The aim was to determine subjects' morphological competence in selecting rival suffixes which appropriately convey the conceptualizations of their experiences in communicative contexts. The data isolated from the larger corpus were analysed and observed to feature appropriately and inappropriately derived nominal and adjectival composite words. Results of the study indicate a high frequency of occurrence of the *–ent* rival suffix. Consequently, derivatives in *–ent* were more in number than those in other rival suffix morphemes, like *–ce* or *–y*. By a mere

frequency count and a calculation of the actual instances of occurrence in simple percentages, it was observed that the total number of derivatives in *–ent* was fifty-six (56) representing 35.2% of the total number of rival morphemes which featured in the corpus data; while the rival suffix with the second highest frequency of occurrence was *–ant* with 28 instances of occurrence representing 17.6%. The frequency of occurrence and percentages of the rival morphemes are shown in table 2. Table 3 contains the actual instances of their occurrence in containing syntactic expressions.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Rival Suffixes in the Corpus Studied

Rival Suffix Distinction Frequency

Representative	Distinction	Frequency	Percentage (%)
-an(ce)	Instance	21	13.2%
-ant	Specific	28	17.6%
-ent	Agenthood	56	35.2%
-ce	State	17	10.7%
-cy	Status	12	7.6%
-ise	Causation	10	6.3%
-ity	Mode	11	6.9%
-ing	Cause	4	2.5%
		159	100%

Table 3: Samples of Rival Suffixes from the Corpus

S/N	Containing Syntactic Expressions	Word Class of Root
1	The study is significance because it also help to highlight the difficulties students have in using English tenses	Verb
2.	It makes all the different	Verb
3.	Time is expressed in referent to daily activities like working walking up from sleep, etc.	Verb
4.	These usages are to make up for the absent of verbal cues in the medium	Noun
5.	In a linguistically diverse community some of the languages are bound to gain prominent over others	Noun
6.	Military rule is characterised by dictatorship because of the absent of democracy	Noun
7.	This paper attempted to x-ray the responsiveness of the Nigerian Military and her involvement in quelling violence threat to Nigeria's national security	Adjective
8.	From past independent to past millennium	Verb
9.	Federal government should establish and independence agency in consultation with MOSOP	Verb
10.	Their definitions were inconsistence to the definitions in the textbook	Adjective
11.	These are some of the issues that culminated to (sic) the violence attack at Uyo road, Ikot Ekpene and the reprisal attack at Idongesit Nkanga Secretariat 2011	Adjective
12.	In the past all information was surface-based for a fixed location and at a particular instant in time	Noun
13.	The gases which envelop the earth is the most significance in the study of weather and climate	Verb
14.	Lagos was ceded to the British before and after independent in 1960	Verb
15.	… sequel to the advise	Verb
16.	Excellence God	Adjective

17.	He considered it an act of negligent	Adjective
18.	… in the absent of …	Adjective
19.	… have not set up a precedent	Adjective
20.	The rule has no laid down precedent	Adjective
21.	After sometime some banks became bankruptcy	Adjective
22.	… to issue license	Noun
23.	The government felt that some form of normality has returned …	Adjective
24.	Some members felt that we were just participators in the ceremony	Verb
25.	The increase in the use and mastering of the suffixes helped expand the user's vocabulary and understanding	Verb
26	The word is referred to as monna reminiscence of the heavenly food which sustained the pilgrims throughout their journey	Noun
27	In his song King David tells us more about the important of God's word	Noun

4. Discussion of Findings

Samples of the corpus data show that nominal and adjectival derivatives are formed from nominal verbal and adjectival roots. (cf Bauer 1983, Hall 1992, Leiber 2025, Hamawand 2011). A further indication of morphological information relates to the structure of the derivatives in the table under reference. It is apparent that there is variability in the derivational suffixes appended to the rots/bases concerned. This phenomenon validates the major claim of the construal theory – derivational morphemes prefixes or suffixes, impose their profile on the entire structure of derivatives (cf Manova, 2011, Hamawand, 2011, Ratih, 2018).

Samples 1 and 13 illustrate nominal derivatives formed from the verbal root *signify*. In terms of valence determinance, the derivative *significance* is appropriately structured. However, the choice of the *–ce* suffix is not appropriate in the discourse context in which it occurs. As is indicated in the literature (eg Langacker, 1991, Hamawand, 2011, Ratih, 2023 etc.) the *–ce* suffix is a rival morpheme to *–cy* or *–ment* depending on the context and the construal imposed on the root. The *–ce* and *–ment* form nominal apirs from common verbal roots, but each has a different kind of focus.

In the context under consideration, it is not a noun that is required to perform the discourse function intended, but an adjective. The *–ce* suffix does not form adjectives, the *–ant* does. The appropriate morphological formation in the contexts of samples 1 and 13 are shown below:

Sample 1: The study is significant because it also helps to highlight the difficulties students have in using English tenses.

Sample 13: The gases which envelop the earth are the most significant in the study of weather and climate.

-ce and *–cy* are rival morphemes capable of being appended to same adjectival roots to derive nominal pairs. Despite sharing the same root they are discrete in use. The suffix *–ce* highlights the condition that the nominal entity is in at a particular time; the *–cy* rival suffix conveys/ expresses "the status, the relative position or standing, of an entity" (Hamawand, 2011, p. 177). Samples 7, 9, 10, 11, 16 and 25 feature derivatives in *–ce*; sample 20's nominal pair features *–cy* suffix which is used to form the noun *bankruptcy*. As is apparent from the data, the*–ce* and *–cy* suffixes are integrated to adjectival roots to derive nominal composites, viz violent in samples 7, dependent in 9, consistent in 10, violent in 11, excellent in16 *reminiscent* in 25; and the addition of *-cy* to bankrupt in 20, demonstrates facilitation in terms of integration but violation in use. The usages in the discourse contexts under reference show that the rival morphemes *–ce* and *–cy* do not satisfy the expected communicative demands of the discourse in question. For example, in sample 7, the *–ent* suffix is more appropriate to derive an adjective that qualifies the following noun "threat", independent in sample 9 to qualify the noun "*agency* inconsistent in sample 10 to describe the noun phrase "the definitions", *violent* in sample 11 to describe the noun "attack", excellent in 16 to qualify the noun, "God". The derivative in *–cy* in sample 20 should better be the adjective *bankrupt*. This form is more suitable in the context to describe the LU's conception of the status of the bank(s) in question.

From the cognitive morphology stand point, the suffixes -*ing* and –*ed* are used to derive adjectival pairs. They contest to express cause and effect in the domain of voice; however, each is used in different contexts. Morphologically, the suffix –*ing* is employed by a language user to describe the cause or the reason which produces a certain effect of a process, action or activity (cf. Nordquit, 2023). According to Hamawand (2011, p.190), the suffix –*ing* means "causing the action referred to in the root". This shows that the present participle -*ing* can serve adjectival function for LUs in relevant communicate events. Raking through its occurrence in our corpus, the –*ing* suffix features in sample 24. It is attached to the verbal root *master* to form the adjectival derivative *mastering*, but it fails in this context to satisfy the demands of discourse. Instead, the –*y* suffix analysed in morphological literature to form a member of the adjectival pairs is more suitable. The –*y* suffix is used to convey feature, a typical quality of something. In written discourse, adjectives ending in –*y* are mostly used either attributively or predicatively. Thus, the sample 24 discourse should more suitably read, "This increase in the use and mastery of the suffixes helped expand user's vocabulary and understanding".

The –*ity* suffix featured in our data. As is apparent, it forms a nominal derivative on an adjectival root. Its rival is the –*ness* derivational morpheme but they are quite disparate in use. Our data sample features the nominal derivative *normality* but the –*ity* suffix as used in the data is at odds with the construal of the context. The –*ity* suffix refers to an existent, living entity, especially such as is perceived to be real, not imaginary. Hence it means "naming the entity indicated by the root (Hamawand 2011, p. 179). Derived nouns in –*ity* are frequently found to be count nouns since they denote real existing entities. The more suitable suffix in this context is the –*cy* which highlights the status, the normal positioning of an entity. The sentence should then have read, "The government felt that some form of normalcy has returned…"

5. Conclusion

This study took a cognitive morphology viewpoint in analysing data of lexical choices made by educated Nigeria users of English and determining their ability in choosing appropriate nominal and adjectival rival morphemes suitable for expressing construal in relevant communicative contexts. Analyses of the data obtained from subjects' written output showed both appropriate and inappropriate choices of rival morphemes. A rake through the corpus data showed a high occurrence of derivatives in –*ent* while derivatives in –*ant* recorded the second highest occurrence.

A further observation about the data relates to the fact that the subjects exhibited facilitation regarding valence determinance but lack requisite morphological competence in choosing suitable nominalizers and adjectivalizers. This resulted in their failure to adequately convey the conceptualizations of their experiences. Still from our data it was clear that rival morphemes are neither in free variation nor are they synonymous in meaning. These observations confirm observations made in earlier works on derivation (e.g. Tuggy, 2005, Plag and Baayen, 2009, Manova, 2011).

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