

## Book Review

**Marion Neubauer. 2024.** *English Nouns since 1150: A Typological Study*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, xv+254 pp. ISBN: 978-3-11-131747-2 (hbk).

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Marion Neubauer's *English Nouns since 1150: A Typological Study* combines nouns with a typological approach, outlining an empirically grounded, diachronically delved, and reasonably comprehensive account of how and why English nouns changed over 850 years. It aims to remedy the lack of typological perspective and quantification in the lexical domain, with the objective to trace the typological development of the English nouns based on quantified data for the time from 1150 to 2000. The study falls squarely within the trend of investigating English evolution applying corpus-driven methodology, offering empirical insights into the extending process and structure of the nominal lexicon.

The book consists of thirteen chapters. Excluding the introducing chapter (Chapter 1), it is organized into four parts: “Part I: Morphological typology and the English lexicon” (Chapters 2–3), “Part II: Means to extend the nominal lexicon since 1150” (Chapters 4–6), “Part III: Typological profile of the nominal data since 1150” (Chapters 7–10), and “Part IV: Discussion and conclusion” (Chapters 11–13).

The first chapter sets the scene by examining the typological profile of English, addressing two key issues: five processes are employed to extend the nominal word-stock and speakers have chosen techniques to enlarge the lexicon in accordance with the typological profile of their word-stock.

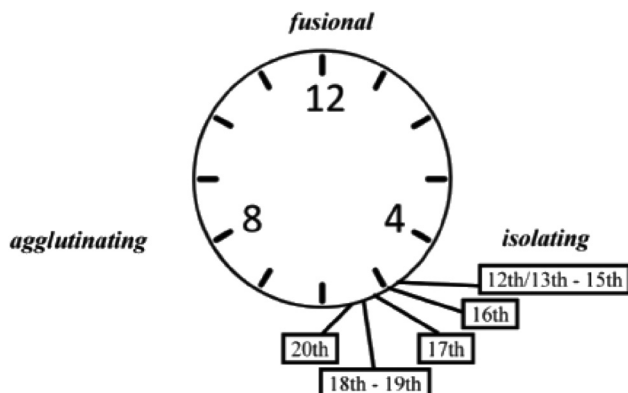
Part 1 reviews previous research and prepares the concepts for the remainder of the book. Chapter 2 offers a brief introduction to morphological typology. Language types are classified as analytic or synthetic, also categorized as isolating, agglutinating, or fusional. Analytic languages, equated with isolating, are featured in one-to-one correspondence between morpheme and word. Synthetic languages utilize both agglutinating and fusional techniques to merge morphemes into single words, which is achieved by rich inflectional systems. As languages develop over time, they are roughly prone to move around a typological circle: isolating to agglutinating, fusional, back to isolating, and so on (Dixon 1997). Based on these basic ideas, Chapter 3 is narrowed to derivation and the typological shifts in the English lexicon from Old English to Middle English. There are four typological parameters in the lexical domain: status of the base, lexical strata, morphophonemic alternations, and affix

position. Old English signaled a move toward analytic and agglutinative structures while Middle English saw a partial resurgence of syntheticity due to extensive French contact. According to the above four parameters and observed diachronic changes, five processes of word formation that contribute to the expansion of a language's lexicon are specified, i.e. borrowing, conversion, compounding, Germanic affixation, and Romance affixation. These processes pertain to different language types. Borrowing and conversion processes trigger isolating subtype, whereas compounding and Germanic affixation are agglutinating, and fusion is implemented by Romance affixation.

Part 2 is rooted in the empirical investigations and processes by which nominal lexicon is semantically extended. Chapter 4 elucidates the setup of corpora and retrieval methods. The corpora consist of all types of texts and guarantee equal tokens in each century. Meanwhile, the search criteria are clearly defined. Some elements, such as *Adj. + N* strings (e.g. dryfoot), are ruled out, while some are retained, such as *Adj. + N* compounds (e.g. self-will). Based on quantified data, Chapter 5 examines processes by which English has expanded its nominal lexicon since 1150. Detailed analyses of individual processes reveal that, at both type and token levels, isolating techniques have sharply declined since the Middle English period, mostly due to close contact with Romance. By contrast, agglutinating has been the predominant choice for English speakers since the 15th century. The fusional technique remains marginal with low numbers of types and tokens. The substantial Chapter 6 reports on noun formation patterns. This chapter makes an important contribution by shifting the focus from what kinds of nouns entered the language to why certain modes of formation were favored and others declined. It complements the preceding chapter effectively, beginning with identifying three factors in word formation: analogy, model nouns, and transparency. Analogy refers to the cognitive operation to perceive similarities between items. Model nouns are the specific word schema that language users can imitate to create new nouns. Transparency denotes the analyzability of a complex lexeme in terms of its constituent morphemes, serving as a subjective parameter to measure the degree of clarity for language users. If a word and its morphemes are explicit to speakers, it is treated as transparent. Apparently, the three factors are interrelated. Transparency is the prerequisite in assessing whether a complex noun can be a model noun for other creations. Model nouns are featured in high transparency, and non-model nouns tend to be opaque. New nouns emerge from model nouns, with analogy playing a central role in this process. However, the assumed (potential) products of model nouns don't always align with the actual usages. By comparing the distribution of potential and actual model nouns, the author concludes that language users are basically capable of perceiving the internal structure of any given transparent complex noun. In this way, speakers' inventory of model nouns is well expanded.

From a typological perspective, the distribution of model lexemes suggests that agglutinating techniques predominated until the 14th century and revitalized in the 20th century. Isolating has gained leading status since the 15th century. Notably, however, language users don't necessarily adhere to the typological trends established by model lexemes when coding new words; instead, their choices are shaped by cognitive and sociocultural forces. The rare use of conversion and rise of compounding attests that agglutinating techniques are vastly preferred to enlarge the nominal word-stock. To find a clearer typological shift, it is essential to further explore the degree of analyticity and syntheticity in the nominal lexicon. Filling this research gap will be the focus of the following part.

Part 3 is couched within the usage-based framework. It recurses to token frequency so as to give a precise typological profile of English nouns. Chapter 7 delimits the research scope, analyzing the complexity of nouns in terms of their constituent morphemes, irrespective of etymological origins. Having outlined the criteria for determining the morphological structure of complex words, the author adopts Greenberg's synthetic index to measure the degree of syntheticity in each century. The slightly increased syntheticity challenges the traditional assumption of English as evolving steadily toward isolation, instead highlighting a more dynamic history marked by both reduction and resurgence of morphological complexity. To distinguish between the synthetic subtypes, Chapter 8 proposes an alternative measure to calculate the fusional degree. The author devises the fusion index of complex words. Specifically, four parameters – base variance, affix variance, status of base, and status of affix – are employed to handle the morphemic status. Fusional indices are visualized in Dixon's clock to locate the entire nominal usage data in each period, as sketched in Figure 1 (p. 177). Figure 1 makes amply clear two things. Firstly, throughout the 850-year study period, English nominal lexicon has only moved 4 minutes towards being more agglutinative. The slow and steady progression averages a minimal change per century. Secondly, the nominal lexicon has been a typological mixture of isolation and agglutination with a retainment of isolating characteristics. Chapter 9 is devoted to a comparison of synthetic/analytic indices in grammatical and lexical domains. The development of the lexical index parallels those in the grammatical domain. Given that monomorphemic nouns have been employed three times more often than complex lexemes, analytic index value is more than three times as synthetic index value. Overall, grammatical structure and lexical content appear to have formed a semicircle within the syntheticity-analyticity variability. Chapter 10 adopts a macroscopic view to link the lexicon-extending means in Part 2 with the typological profile of nominal language in Part 3. In general, the typological profile of the word-stock accords with the typological techniques for extending lexical meaning. Diachronically, the trend towards a synthetic lexicon has seemingly intensified the use of agglutinative processes since Early Middle English.



**Figure 1:** Typological stages of the nominal usage data since 1150.

This indicates that the formation of new words has been influenced by the typological changes.

Part 4 is dedicated to a more in-depth discussion in terms of the empirical findings. Chapter 11 hypothesizes the similar typological shifts between nominal and verbal domains, i.e. a transition from synthetic structures to analytic structures. Again, the author reports the conviction that there is an astonishing parallelism in grammatical and lexical morphology. Beyond the level of morphology, other levels of language are also emphasized. At the phrase level, phrasal verbs and composite predicates are more likely to be used. At the sentence level, English has moved from the flexible sentence patterns of Old English to the more rigid SVO word order in English. At the context level, there is a greater reliance on context for syntactic disambiguation and semantic specification. Undoubtedly, developments on various planes are inherently interrelated, so that the language can be viewed in a united direction. Chapter 12 delves into the cognitive mechanisms and sociocultural factors that determine the typological development of English nouns. Cognitive mechanisms include neuromotor automation, categorization, analogical extension, chunking, direct association of form and meaning and strong reliance on context. Sociocultural factors are concerned with clarity, communication, inflationary use, and contact with other speech communities. Cognitive and sociocultural forces function together in English typological development. For instance, neuromotor automation simplifies pronunciation and accelerates the analytical trend. The desire for communication enhances syntheticity in the nominal word-stock. Chapter 13 draws theoretical and methodological conclusions from the historical work. In sum, Middle English has gone through increasing analyticity. Since Early Middle English, syntheticity has been on the rise. Due to the slow speed, English nouns are still featured in analyticity.

Finally, the author offers expectations for future work, not only do non-nominal lexical categories need detailed examination but also the task to test whether the results in present study can be generalized to larger fields outside morphology.

This book is a coherent and thought-provoking study of English nouns. Neubauer makes a strong and compelling contribution to the field in at least four important aspects. First of all, rigorous empirical evidence is surely persuasive. From corpus design to statistical tackling, the meticulous preparations underscore the complexity of the whole task. The subtle changes and complex parameters are captured by exhaustive counting and vivid graphs. More importantly, Neubauer is adept at determining precisely what a particular numerical finding does or does not show. Readers can discern trends and developmental features by themselves, whose conclusions are possibly compatible with the author's. Secondly, this study conducts a research template applicable to other lexical categories. Neubauer follows bottom-up clues to trace the typological profile of English nouns. The prerequisite for figuring out whether a language leans towards analytic or synthetic is zooming in on its related techniques and processes. The enclosed appendices of all affixes and compounding types are of great help for further research. Neubauer briefly discusses the verbal domain with little qualitative analysis and overlooks adjective category. These are the limits of this book and naturally a gap to be filled. To some extent, typological investigations of verbs and adjectives can take a page from this present study with the aim of concisely depicting English diachronic changes. Thirdly, one of the pioneering findings is the cyclic movement of English nouns, as illustrated in Figure 1. The author not only sketches potential trends but also takes the rate of change into consideration. On the one hand, such an arrangement better explains why syntheticity grows in Early Middle English whereas it is reasonable to claim English is towards analytic. On the other hand, it suggests that English is slow to change its typological profile so that there is still a prolonged path to complete the circle. Lastly, the integration of objective descriptions with subjective explanations rounds off this work. Neubauer makes a movement towards the explanatory insights through cognitive and pragmatic lenses, bridging practical usage with theoretical underpinnings. In comparison with earlier typological accounts, Neubauer's analysis goes beyond the widely assumed unidirectional drift from syntheticity to analyticity (Greenberg 1960). The findings resonate with Szmrecsanyi's (2012, 2016) conclusions that English are not characterized by a stable drift toward more analyticity and less syntheticity. Rather, analyticity was increasing until the end of the Early Middle English period, but declined subsequently; the reverse is true for syntheticity. The semicircle predication corroborates the notion of a linguistic cycle involving both grammatical and lexical categories (van Gelderen 2024).

The amount of information in this book is certainly abundant. Nevertheless, this book is not without its flaws. Firstly, more examples should be added. When a new

term is introduced, only literal annotation is not enough for readers to fully understand. The best way is to give several instances to make it more straightforward. Moreover, the author just italicizes examples but doesn't label them, which renders a slightly hard reading. Secondly, the explanatory part only takes up a small portion, especially the application of cognitive factors does not seem to have been adequately explained. For example, Section 12.1 interprets chunking as one of the cognitive factors, however, the subsequent sections don't touch on how it influences word formation at all. It's fair to say that the author stops at the general accounting rather than deeper thinking on cognitive mechanisms.

In a short review, this book merits serious consideration. It will be of great significance to the study of word class and typology. The primary readership of this book will be scholars and graduate students in historical linguistics, English morphology, and corpus linguistic studies. Researchers interested in the typological classification of languages and the long-term development of English within an analytic-synthetic spectrum will find the book particularly relevant.

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