

Abstract:

This thesis examines suffixation in Middle English in the periods 1200-1299 and 1300-1399. More specifically, the work is focussed on nominal coinages of native origin only, formed with the suffixes *-ness*, *-head / -hood*, *-ship* and *-dom*, where the aim is to observe their productivity in time.

In the theoretical part, we explore the contribution of external (socio-political) and internal (typological and word-formational) factors to changes in the English language, including word-formation processes. Our hypothesis is that suffixation as a word-formation process will continue strongly, despite the ongoing language-internal changes and the overwhelming influx of foreign words.

Data for this research was collected from *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* through Advance Search. The data retrieved for each suffix was considered from a morphological, structural and lexico-semantic perspective. The analyses were performed to detect changes in the behaviour of each suffix and to discover the realities attesting their productivity. Moreover, the analyses uncovered additional phenomena: types that had only one quotation (hapaxes) and competition occurring between the selected suffixes. The hapaxes were also investigated for their morphological, structural and semantic features so as to identify any common traits and therefore provide an additional insight into the productivity of the selected suffixes. The competition of the suffixes manifests itself in our data due to their functional and semantic closeness and there are bases that have multiple membership as to suffixes. This phenomenon was examined as well.

Our hypothesis proved to be true partially. The individual results are diverse as each suffix has its specific intricacies, but in general, their productivity increases except for *-ship*. In addition, the bases throughout the samples are chiefly deadjectival and the types predominantly denote a quality. The transition of the Old English period to the Middle English period is marked by the significant decline of the English language in terms of prestige as well as textual production. However, English slowly regained its position as it spread to higher social classes. The increased productivity of the native means appears to correlate with the gradual ascent of the English language.