Aviating among the hapax legomena: Morphological grammaticalisation in current British newspaper English

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This paper describes three adjectivizing affixes in British newspaper text, -type, mock-, and -shape, which are widely used but have thus far escaped detailed documentation in the literature. This study is part of a larger project on lexical innovation in which we combine the methodology followed by the first author in the earlier AVIATOR project, in which successive chunks of news data were analyzed, with the approach to morphological productivity taken by the second author. In Baayen and Renouf (1996), we discuss the productivity of five well-established derivational affixes in The Times: -ness, -ly, -un-, in, and -Ly. The present study focuses on three ‘vogue’ affixes and their use in The Independent, a newspaper for which a corpus has been compiled of roughly 280 million word tokens covering the years 1988-1997. We present our findings for the prefix mock- in Section 1. In Section 2, we turn to -type, a suffix which is very productive in our data. Finally, Section 3 deals with the suffix -shape, which appears to be becoming available as a new alternative to -shaped.

1. mock-

The use of mock as an adjectival noun modifier is well known. The Collins Cobuild English Dictionary (Sinclair 1995, hereafter ‘Cobuild’) gives examples of phrases such as

mock horror
mock Tudor

and the Collins English Dictionary (Makins 1995, henceforth ‘CED’) records similar combinations:
mock battle
mock finals

The Collins English Dictionary (Makins 1995, hereafter 'CED') also accords a separate entry to mock- as a hyphenated de-adjectival prefix, giving as example mock-heroic. The entry in the Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (Summers 1993, henceforth 'Longman') mentions the use of mock with nouns, and also its use as a prefix in hyphenated forms:

mock battle
mock-serious

These examples suggest that the hyphenated, prefixed form is restricted to adjectives, and that it is an adjectival modifier before nouns.

Our data reveal a far more extensive use of mock-. We have counted 290 different formations with mock- (of which 224 are hapax legomena), but only 51 instances where mock is used as an independent modifying form, contrary to what the dictionaries seem to suggest. By itself, this already suggests that mock- is felt to be a prefix by English journalists. The suffixal status of mock- is further supported by the following observations. Firstly, it no longer attaches only to adjectives and nouns: it is also found prefixed to verbs and adverbs, as in the following examples:

You know a writer is in trouble when he has to mock-apologise for his tedious bleating... with the odd, rpa medieval word mock-casually tossed in

Although compound verbs in English are rather rare (Bauer 1983: 208), it might be objected that mock-apologise is a compound rather than a derived word. And although, admittedly, noun-verb compounds such as carbon-copy are unproductive and generally formed through back-formation, adjective-verb compounds, such as fine-tune enjoy some productivity (Bauer 1983: 208). Hence mock in mock-apologise could in principle be an adjective. However, this possibility can be ruled out, as mock and fine have different distributional properties. In contrast to fine, mock does not occur in complement position:

*the battle is mock
that example is fine

Similarly, it does not occur as an adverb after suffixation with -ly:

he apologized mockly; he pitched the offer foilly

This shows that fine is an adjective and mock a prefix. We conclude that mock-emerges from our data as a fully-fledged non-category-changing prefix that attaches to all four major word categories.

Secondly, it might be argued for a phrase such as the heavy breathing of mock-literate dialogue that the hyphen is induced by the general use of hyphens in complex premodifiers. However, we have clear examples of mock being written without a hyphen in other syntactic constructions as well:

Joker looked mock-astonished at the suggestion that Arkansas Tigers had made it difficult for civilians
I'm sorry to disturb you, I said, mock-humble

Examples such as these also show that mock+A formations have the full distributional potential of adjectives. Above, we mentioned in passing that mock also occurs preceding adjectives without a hyphen, albeit rarely, as in

after the mock prizegiving ceremony

The common factor in these un-hyphenated cases seems to be that mock- has scope over the adjectival phrase (prizegiving ceremony) rather than over the adjective (prizegiving) itself. We suspect that mock- is not attached to the adjective because this would visually obscure its intended scope. When its scope is restricted to the immediately following adjective, as in

mock Egyptian headstones, tombs, and catacombs

mock is happily prefixed.

Since mock- is not mentioned at all in the older morphological monographs by Marchand (1969) and Bauer (1968), and since its full present scope is not adequately captured by recent dictionaries, our conclusion is that its productive use is a fairly recent development. Some quantitative support for this hypothesis is provided by the frequencies of formations with mock- in our data. There are relatively few high-frequency words with mock-, while the number of hapax legomena (224) comprises 77.2% of all types (290). A frequency distribution with
only a handful of well-entrenched formations and a very large series of hapax legomena - the prime candidates for being neologisms (Baayen and Renouf 1996) - is typical for affixes that have only become productive recently. Note that among the fifteen highest-frequency types,

mock-Tudor 96  mock-epic  8  
mock-heroic 31  mock-Classical  7  
mock-Georgian 25  mock-Elizabethan 7  
mock-lunatic 18  mock-innocence  4  
mock-croc  14  mock-leather  4  
mock-Medieval 10  mock-Edwardian  3  
mock-Victorian 10  mock-serious  3  
mock-Gothic  8  

we typically find those formations that are also mentioned in the dictionaries.

Words such as mock-Tudor, mock-heroic and mock-serious may well have served as the launching pad from which mock- has spread to broader semantic domains. Consider, for instance, the following hapax legomena:

mock-Byzantine  
mock-Livonian  
mock-Handelian  
mock-Mahler  
mock-astonished  
mock-fastidious  
mock-chivalric  
mock-posh  
mock-grimace  
mock-incompetence  
mock-outrage  
mock-snake  

The first two examples indicate that mock- still yields new forms in the domain of historical and geographical styles (cf. mock-Tudor). But mock- now also attaches to the names of composers (e.g., mock-Bach) to yield ironic terms for musical styles. Our data suggest that mock- has become particularly productive with respect to ironising personal attitudes and emotions (mock-astonished, mock-outrage, cf. mock-serious, the only formation mentioned in the Longman dictionary), but it has also extended to other abstract domains (mock-celebrity, mock-quest). Instances of mock- attaching to concrete nouns (mock-snake) are scarce in our data.

2. -type

A suffix that is even more productive in our database is -type. This suffix is not mentioned in Marchand (1969) or Bauer (1983), nor in the Cobuild or Longman dictionaries. The CED mentions only combining forms with type (e.g., archetypal, collectotype), and noun compounds (e.g., printing type). In our database of journalistic prose, we count some 1,770 different formations with -type as an adjective-forming suffix, of which roughly 1,360 types occur once only. Examples of the 10 highest-frequency forms as well as of 10 hapax legomena are:

E-type 75  wolf-type  1  
Chernobyl-type 53  women-type  1  
D-type 45  woodwind-choral-type  1  
commodity-type 36  work-type  1  
Squint-type 33  workshop-type  1  
equine-type 27  world-type  1  
C-type 25  wristwatch-type  1  
JAT-type 23  yoga-type  1  
IBM-type 22  yoghurt-type  1  
family-type 19  zeppelin-type  1  

As in the case of mock-, we are dealing with a word frequency distribution with a relatively small number of high-frequency, well-entrenched words, and a long series of hapax legomena which together account for 76.6 of all types. Again, this distribution is typical for a vogue affix with a sudden burst of productivity. Almost all our examples of formations in -type are denominal. Some examples of de-adjecival forms are attested, however, 14 in all:

British-type 2  international-type  
cellular-type 2  Lebanese-type  
western-type 2  ineliminable-type  
Iranian-type 1  papal-type  
institutional-type 1  homosexual-type  
military-type 1  ancient-type  
continental-type 1  Danish-type  

Unlike mock- and -shape, -type seems to be restricted to prenominal use only, as exemplified by the following phrases:

afunky, regional blues-type version two  
pieces of woven card-type material to  
build mechanical-type toys  
quick, exciting news-type pictures  

...
The large numbers of hapax legomena, comprising more than 70% of the types for mock- and -type, 62% for -shaped, and 55% for -shaped, are indicative of the ephemeral nature of most of the formations with these affixes. While the affixes themselves are clearly well-established in journalistic prose, their function seems to be more pragmatic in nature than lexical. The affixes -type and -shaped give writers and speakers the flexibility to express approximation of class membership in a dense morphological form instead of using syntactic periphrastic constructions. They are markers of more informal styles. Mock-, on the other hand, has the pragmatic function of indicating the intention of irony while at the same time expressing the non-genuine nature of the approximation involved. It often attaches to more rarified base words (grimace, chivalric, tastidius, etc.), which increases its ironic potential.

It is the semi-lexical, pragmatic nature of these affixes which may partly account for their absence in lexicographic and morphological discussion. Complex words with primarily syntactic and/or pragmatic functions are more likely to escape attention than words that require substantive semantic processing in the mental lexicon. In addition, the fact that the majority of such formations are hapax legomena may also have hindered their detection in corpus-based surveys, especially where on-line KWIC concordances are combined with frequency thresholds. Nevertheless, these vague affixes currently still undergoing grammaticalization are at least as productive as a well-established adjectivizing suffix such as -ish. For instance, in the last quarter of 1995, we counted the following numbers of hapax legomena:

-ish 15
mock- 14
-type 27
-shaped 13
-shape 1

Accepting counts of hapax legomena as reasonable indicators of degrees of productivity (Baayen and Renouf 1996), we can say that mock- and -shape(d) are roughly as productive as -ish, while -type emerges as being almost twice as productive.

Interestingly, -type, mock- and -shape(d) are not the only vague affixes that are currently productive in British journalism. Other affixes for expressing various kinds of similarity that appear as productive in our database include cod-, faux-, style-, like, and -effect. We leave the description of these affixes to another occasion.

References


