

## Rethinking morphologization: German N+V nominalizations on the pathway from phrases to words

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Morphologization is often seen as a sub-process of grammaticalization (e.g., Lehmann 2004). This contribution reintroduces morphologization as a central process of language change that also affects constructions at the level of productive word formation. Based on a large diachronic corpus study of German N+V (noun + verb) nominalizations such as *Feuerlöscher* ‘fire extinguisher’, it will be argued that morphologization involves several linguistic levels and occurs at abstract levels of linguistic knowledge.

Morphologization from syntax (cf. Joseph 2003: 473) is a process in which linguistic units abandon syntactic features and become more morphological. It is mainly considered in the context of grammaticalization. Authors such as Hopper & Traugott (2003: 140-142) understand it as the change of a free lexeme into an affix. However, morphologization also occurs independently of grammaticalization (Joseph 2003: 475-478), for instance in cases of univerbation (cf. 1). Just as with the emergence of affixes, these are isolated cases.

(1) German *lange Weile* ‘long time’ > *Langeweile* ‘boredom’

So far, morphologization has rarely been associated with productive patterns of multi-lexical units. Exceptions to this include Fuhrhop (2000) and Hübener (2023). This contribution aims to show that morphologization occurs systematically in N+V nominalizations, a highly productive pattern in the history of German.

In German N+V nominalizations such as *Tellerwäscher* ‘dishwasher’, the nominal first constituent saturates an argument of the base verb: *Teller waschen* ‘to wash dishes’ > *Tellerwäscher* ‘dishwasher’. Due to this internal argument structure, N+V nominalizations have an ambivalent status between phrases and words. This can be seen in the form of the nominal first constituent. N+V nominalizations tend to preserve the nominal form from the corresponding verb phrase (cf. 2), highlighted in brackets. In contrast, root compounds with corresponding first constituents, which do not exhibit an internal argument structure, often take linking elements such as *-s-* (cf. 3).

(2) [*Beitrag*]zahler ‘contributor’ – *einen* [*Beitrag*] zahlen ‘to pay a contribution’

(3) [*Beitrags*]höhe ‘contribution amount’

In order to investigate the diachronic change of N+V nominalizations, this study examined corpora covering all periods from Old High German (starting in 750 AD) until today. With the help of suffix-based queries, instances of four different nominalization patterns have been retrieved. Manual annotation included layers such as features of the first constituent and spelling. The analyses show that verb phrases are becoming less important as analogical sources for the first constituent of N+V nominalizations, while root compounds increasingly become analogical sources: *Beitragzahler* > [*Beitrags*]zahler in analogy to [*Beitrags*]höhe and the like. Moreover, (word-typical) concatenated spellings have spread at the expense of (phrase-typical) separated spellings. Overall, morphologization is attested at all linguistic levels studied, including morpho-syntax, graphemics, and semantics.

Thus, morphologization does not only affect individual affixes and cases of univerbation. It also occurs with productive lexical patterns at the abstract level [N + V<sub>nominalized</sub>]. The results have far-reaching consequences for the status of morphologization as a process of language change. It should not be considered as a selectively occurring phenomenon, but as a higher-level mechanism that occurs in both grammar and word formation, affecting constructions and their network structure.

Furthermore, given that morphologization is a gradual process, the study provides diachronic evidence for the constructionist view that morphology and syntax form the poles of a continuum.

### References

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