

Word formation patterns reflecting discipline-specific communicative needs in scientific writing throughout the 20th century

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This presentation will illustrate discipline-specific differences in the development and usage of selected word formation patterns in the Royal Society Corpus (RSC; Kermes et al. 2016) containing the Philosophical Transactions (Phil. Trans.) and the Proceedings (Proc.) of the Royal Society of London. The RSC contains the articles that were published from 1665 onwards in Phil. Trans. and Proc. and its more specialized successor journals Phil. Trans. A and B (after 1887) and Proc. A and B (after 1905). While the early journals used to cover all major scientific disciplines of the time, the A series are dedicated to the mathematical and physical sciences; and the B series cover the biological sciences. Here I will compare the A and B journals throughout the 20th century and highlight word formation trends that reflect discipline-specific new communicative needs. There are important differences with regard to Germanic and Latinate word formation elements and the average number of lexical morphemes and affixes per word, the usage of multiword expressions, e.g. adjective noun combinations in terminology (Menzel 2021). Overall, there are diachronically more stable word formation rules in the A series and a higher degree of multimorphemic and multiword formations than in the B series. There are also discipline-specific strategies for information densification (e.g. via acronyms). I will present possible explanations from the perspective of communicative needs arising with ongoing specialization and diversification processes in academic discourse that lead to the conventionalization of word formation trends and the spread of particular formations to new contexts and usages.

References:

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