Aero-Lexicography: Observations on the Treatment of Combinemes and Neoclassical Combinations in Historical and Scholarly European Dictionaries

Abstract

This paper compares the treatment of aero- and the combinations of which it is the initial component in selected historical and scholarly English, French and German dictionaries which allow a comparison between the different lexicographical traditions and languages. It concentrates on the morphological status of aero- as a bound word-formation item or combineme and on the structure and etymology of neoclassical combinations with aero-, and concludes with a plea for a paneuropean dictionary of Neolatin.

1. Neoclassical combinations and the combineme aero-

Anyone who has written or studied European dictionaries must be familiar with the vast repertoire of lexical items derived ultimately from classical Greek and Latin that make up a large part of his or her essential metalanguage. Lexicography and metalexicography are cases in point, as are terminology and terminography, morphology, etymology and lexicology, neuro-, psycho- or sociolinguistics, lexicostatistics, and many more either already available to or readily borrowed into or coined in most European vernaculars. Such items have a number of noteworthy characteristics, four of which this paper comments on briefly, especially in respect of etymology and morphology as treated in selected historical and scholarly dictionaries.

First, such items are truly European, which means that any study of them must have a European and multilingual dimension that has not been and may not be easily accommodated by national and largely unilingual philologies and lexicographies. Certainly, a European perspective is essential to establish their etymology, both their immediate provenance and their ultimate source, to ascertain e.g. whether a given item in English may have been taken over from Greek or Latin, Medieval Latin or Neolatin, borrowed from another European vernacular, or coined in the domestic tradition. Second, they are for the most part modern formations not handed down from classical antiquity, even though their components are more often than not Greek or Latin in origin, but coined in Neolatin or in a European vernacular. Hence the tag 'neoclassical' as found in the English literature. Third, they are in most cases complex morphological items readily analysable into smaller components, analysable at least by educated speakers, especially by those in
professions that require a tertiary or university background. Their precise morphological status will depend on the status of their components. Hence the superonym ‘combination’ seems more appropriate in the first instance than hyponyms such as ‘compound’ and ‘derivative’ which require or imply stricter definition. Fourth, these components are sometimes identifiable as lexemes or as syntactic end categories, e.g. *lexicography*, *linguistics* and *statistics*, but in other cases they are not, as with *meta-*, –*graphy*, –*logy*, *neuro-*, *psycho-*, *socio-* and *lexico-* in the above examples. These latter are all bound items found in combination with other items. Hence they may be called ‘combinemes’, a generic term which opposes them to lexemes as freestanding items, but leaves their precise morphological status open to subcategorisation (Hoppe et al. 1987: 442–444).

The morphological status of such European combinemes of Grecolatin origin, and hence of the combinations coined with them, seems to be a matter of dispute. As is the etymology of such neo- or euroclassical combinations. This is true not least of historical and scholarly lexicography, which is the main and often the sole source of information on euroclassicisms. Indeed, the more (different) dictionaries one consults, the more (different) treatments and descriptions one finds. This is certainly true of interlingual comparisons; it is also true of intralingual comparisons; and it is even true of different dictionaries from the same publisher (Kirkness 1993). To get a sharper focus on such disputes, this paper concentrates on the item *aero-* in English, French and German, three vernaculars that are among the most important in the lexical give and take in post-Renaissance Europe. There are two principal reasons for this choice.

First, *aero-* is lemmatised in the most comprehensive and informative modern historical and scholarly dictionaries in each case: *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, especially in the Second Edition (*OED*2), *Trésor de la langue française (TLF)*, and *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm. Neubearbeitung (DWB*2). This makes possible an unusual measure of comparability between three different lexicographical traditions in Europe, one of which – German – has diverged so markedly from the other two in respect of the treatment, or better non-treatment, of euroclassicisms that comparisons are usually impossible. These dictionaries are founded primarily on attestations in written sources, many (or most or some) of which are explicitly mentioned or directly quoted, and thus provide the most reliable textual material yet available as a basis for comment on lexical features and developments in the three languages. Second, the OED entry for *aero-* introduced in 1884 the term ‘combining form’. Significantly, it referred not to the English lemma *aero-*-, but to Greek (transliterated) *aero-* as the combining form of Greek *aer, aera* ‘air, the atmosphere’, from which English *aero-* was adopted. ‘Combining form’ has subsequently established itself in the English literature as the preferred label for non-affixal bound word-formation items such as *aero-*-. However, it does not seem to have found an equivalent in say French or German, where ‘confix’
has been used recently (Hoppe et al. 1987: 424-444; Kocourek 1982: 94, 108-110). The variations in terminology reflect continuing uncertainty over morphological status.

2. Aero–Lexicography in English, French and German

*OED*\(^2\) records some 140 *aero*–combinations: 45 are listed in different typefaces in an introductory nest article on the lemma *aero*– together with definitions, dated textual examples and some etymologies; some 64 are lemmatised individually, with 30 further sublemmas, and have concise articles containing information on meaning, usage and etymology–history as well as dated textual examples. The combinations cover the whole range from obsolete, technical or ephemeral to fully lexicalised and in widespread current use. *OED*\(^2\) does not specify the word class or part of speech of English *aero*–. Thus the morphological structure and status of the combinations with *aero*– as initial component also remain vague, even when one follows up the cross-references to the terminal components, some of which have lexeme status (*dynamics, foil*), many of which however do not (*logy, -naut etc.). All main lemmas have etymologies, with English coinages clearly distinguished from borrowings. When coupled with the datings, this information enables one to reorder the combinations chronologically and reconstruct the development of *aero*– as a combineme in English, even though many questions remain open. The oldest combination is *aeromancy* \(1393\) (why borrowed from an Old French form, especially when this is unattested?), followed by the derivative *aeromancer* \(1400\) and much later by *aeromantic(k)\(1635\) (what is the immediate as opposed to the ultimate Greek source?); then by *aerostatical* \(1685\) (why derived from *aerostatic* when this is first attested in \(1783\)?)\(\); *aerometria* \(1731\), the Latin (Latinate?) form of *aerometry* \(1731\), the Latin (Latinate?) form of *aerometria* \(1731\), the Latin (Latinate?) form of *aerometry* \(1751\) (why not borrowed from older German *Aerometrie* \(1716\), germanised from Neolatin *aerometria* \(1709\)?)\(;\) *aerology* \(1736\) (why not borrowed from older French *aérologie* \(1696\), rather than a modern formation in English from English *aero*– and Greek –logia?)\(;\) and *aereo-elastic* \(1747\), a hapax that perhaps represents the first use of *aero*– as a combineme in English. With the rise of science and technology (chemistry, aviation), *aero*– clearly has established itself as a productive word–formation item in English, especially since the late nineteenth century.

*TLF* records some 120 *aéro*–combinations in an extensive nest article on the lemma *aéro*–, along with the less frequent forms *aér*– and *aéri*–, which includes semantic and morphological information on *aéro*– and its variants in combination, especially on the terminal components with which it combines in French, as well as details on the morphology, pronunciation and spelling, etymology and history of the lemma and references to secondary literature. In addition, some 64 of the combinations are lemmatised individually with details on meaning, usage and etymology–history, textual examples from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in some cases
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frequencies, bibliographies and other information. The pragmatic range of the combinations is very similar to that in English. TLF labels aéro- clearly as "élément préfixal", but refers to it both as "préfixe" and as "élément" in the body of the article. Aéro–combinations are consistently referred to as "mots composés", regardless of whether the terminal component is a freestanding lexeme, a "mot (autonome)" (gare, port), or not, e.g. an "élément suffixal" (−drome, −graphe, −scope etc.). The etymologies of the individually lemmatised items suggest strongly that "dérivation", used in some 10 cases, is restricted to suffixation alone. They also reveal very few borrowings: aéromancie 1380 from Late Latin aeromantia, aéromel 1845 from Greek aeromeli, and aérophobe 1752 from Latin aerophobus (even though older aérophobie 1751 is "composé des éléments aéro– et –phobie"?). The preponderance of French coinages is overwhelming, and raises questions: could not aérologie 1696 be a borrowing or adaptation from Neolatin rather than a combination of the French elements aéro– (previously found only in aéromancie and aéromancien 1545–90) and –logie, just as aérométrie 1712 is more likely borrowed or adapted from Neolatin aerometria, first used by the German Christian Wolff in 1709, as TLF states? Is German influence possible with aérodynamique and aérolithe, just as English is with aerosol? Nonetheless, aéro– is clearly well established as a word–formation item in French, used particularly in the formation of learned classicisms ('mots savants'). The development of aéro– as a combineme from the eighteenth century on follows a path very similar to that of its English counterpart, with the TLF even more informative on that development than OED². Both dictionaries/languages share very many combinations and also include many other items derived ultimately from classical Greek aer and Latin aer to reinforce the central position of the neoclassical aero–/aéro–combinations.

This is not the case in German, which differs markedly. DWB² records but 19 aero–combinations with brief definitions and in half the cases short etymologies in nest articles dominated by generous dated textual examples. Many are taken from encyclopedias and dictionaries (cf. also OED²), which suggests a more restricted currency and pragmatic range of the combinations. They are preceded by a short article on the lemma aero– "als bestimmungswort für eine reihe jüngerer, meist substantivischer Zusammensetzungen im bereich der technik, zu griechisch aer, lat. aer untere lufschicht, dunstkreis, atmosphäre, luft." However, there is no entry on Aero as a lexeme, nor do −logie, −naut, −stat etc. have lexeme status in German, unlike e.g. Bus and Dynamik. Thus the morphological description of aero– as determinans and of aero–combinations as compounds must be called into question. As must the etymologies, which at best suggest the ultimate source, but seldom hint at the immediate provenance of the combinations: the oldest German item, Aerometrie 1716, is rather adapted from Neolatin aerometria (Wolff 1709), as the first example suggests, than formed "aus aero– (= the German lemma) und griechisch metria (zu metron maß)"; Aerostat 1784 is
more likely influenced by its contemporary French and/or English equivalents than formed "aus aero- und lateinisch stare (statum) stehen", Aerologie 1784 more likely either adapted from Neolatin or influenced by its older French and English counterparts than formed "aus aero- und griechisch logia (zu logos wort)"). Only with Aeronaut 1784 and Aeroplan 1894 are the corresponding French items referred to as possible etyma alongside the unlikely combination of German aero- and Greek nautes and planos respectively. Aero- is clearly not well established as a combineme in German, and the treatment of the morphology and etymology of aero-combinations in DWB2 is clearly not on a par with that in OED2 and TLF.

3. Euroclassicisms and Neolatin

The material presented here is necessarily limited and allows only preliminary conclusions that need to be verified – or falsified – by a study of more items, both combinemes and combinations, from more dictionaries from more European vernaculars together with reference to Greek and Latin (dictionaries). Nonetheless, it does raise key questions of morphological and etymological description in historical and scholarly lexicography, questions that quite obviously require a European perspective as the items under consideration could appropriately be tagged 'euroclassicisms'.

First, the material highlights the need for a stricter definition of the morphological status of both combinemes such as aero- and the combinations it enters into. Neither is adequately catered for by the traditional categories of lexeme and prefix or suffix, compound and derivative, even when these are used loosely. Similarities and differences in the use and productivity of a given combineme and in the structure and pragmatic range of its combinations in different vernaculars make European cooperation across languages and lexicographies highly desirable. Second, it highlights the need to consider both immediate provenance and ultimate source in respect of etymology, which necessarily involves modern vernaculars and the classical languages and thus makes European cooperation across languages and lexicographies quite essential. One requirement is complete historico-etymological vernacular dictionaries which include euroclassical combinemes and above all combinations. In this respect, German suffers badly from comparison with English and French – and indeed other vernaculars. Thus there is an urgent need either for DWB2 to proceed beyond the available letters (D and in part A, E) and those planned (A–F) or for alternative lexicographical projects. Another requirement is consultation of the dictionaries and thesauri of classical Greek and Latin and completion of modern dictionaries of Medieval Latin. The third and most pressing requirement, however, is the lexicographical documentation and description of Neolatin, a European phenomenon that
transcended national (language) boundaries for centuries in the early modern era.

This study of *aero*-lexicography can only hint at the importance of Neolatin, directly in respect of *aerology* and *aerometry* (cf. also *aeronautics* and *aerostatics* in *OED*). Indirectly, however, the dearth of vernacular *aero*-combinations before the eighteenth century, the number of mixed vernacular classical etymologies in *DWB* and to a lesser extent *OED*, especially in contrast to the early onset of French domestic coinages in *TLF*, the paucity of *aero*-combinations attested in Medieval or classical Latin, and the semantic gulf between *aero*-combinations in classical Greek and their formal equivalents in modern vernaculars (*aerodrome*, *aeroplane* etc.), when taken together, raise questions about the relationship of ancient Greek to today’s European languages, particularly about its role as a reservoir for modern scientific and academic lexis. They also point to Neolatin as one key to an answer to those questions. But this is a hypothesis that must remain untested until the Neolatin of European scholars, scientists and literary authors is fully chartered territory in European historical and scholarly lexicography (cf. Hoven 1994). A paneuropean dictionary of Neolatin is required.

References


