

Lexicalization and Institutionalization: revisited and extended*

A comment on Peter Hohenhaus: *Lexicalization and institutionalization*

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1. Terminology

It is quite appropriate to explain the terminological confusion by drawing attention to Enkvist's concept of *notational terms*. There is no single 'correct' definition.

Lexicalization is defined here – by Hohenhaus – as a gradual historical process, involving graphemic, phonological and semantic changes and the loss of motivation. The results become “similar in status to unanalysable simplex words” (lexemes), thus “losing its character of a syntagma” and are consequently listed in good dictionaries.

If these are accepted in the **norm** (Coseriu) of a larger or smaller **speech community** they are then **institutionalised**. The old-fashioned British verb *institutionalise* itself may serve as an example, meaning ‘to put so in a mental hospital or *institution* for old people etc’. This differs from the metalinguistic noun *institutionalisation*, as introduced by L. Bauer into the international speech community of linguists, ie technical jargon or vocational slang.

As the language of the smallest ‘community’, Hohenhaus mentions (3.2) a couple's **micro-dialect** (this term itself illustrates **hypostatisation**). So, the question is indeed (see 3.3) ‘institutionalised in *What*’ or what sort of speech community (ie computer freaks, medical people, linguists etc).

Genericness (cf 3.2, fn 20): see Downing's **name-worth category**, deictic compounds and context-dependent words such as Clark and Clark's (1997) **contextuals**, Zimmer's *pumpkin bus* – and in general – the **functions** of novel lexemes, eg playfulness (4.1, 4.4), fads and as ASDs (attention-seeking devices) see Lipka (2000).

De-institutionalization: of course, the “end of a word's life” must also be considered.

2. Lexicalization beyond words

Hohenhaus argues convincingly that *lexicalization* and *institutionalization* applies to ‘larger-than-words objects’, too, such as fixed expressions, idioms and clichés. I would propose that the term *lexicalization* is only motivated for units of the lexicon, like simple and complex lexemes and lexical units, but that *institutionalization* is not restricted in this way. If we adopt a semiotic perspective, all types of signs used for communication may be involved in the two processes, including non-verbal visual signs. In fact, in Lipka (2000) I have made a plea for semiotic word-formation .

If we now focus on purely linguistic signs first, there is no denying, that *whistleblower* is related to *blow the whistle on*, *pain killer/reliever to kill/relieve pain*. The complex lexemes are nominalizations of the respective **collocations** – see Handl (to appear) and are

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institutionalised in the same way as *strong argument*, *strengthen the argument*, or *brew coffee* and *bread and butter*. Like collocations, **routine formulas** – whether or not accompanied by **gestures** (like greetings, toasts, good wishes eg *cheerio*, *cheers*, *Prost*, *Prosit*, *bottoms up*, *The Queen*, *Merry/Happy Christmas* – are obviously institutionalised culture-specifically, as well as lexicalised.

Emoticons like ☺ or ☹ and icons of various kinds, traffic signs and symbolic wheelchairs, directions in international airports for *departure* and *arrival*, an *hour glass* on the PC, all presuppose **visual information**. Non-verbal communication may also use colour, eg in traffic lights, *black* or *white* for mourning, *red* for Communist and the Ukrainean *orange* revolution. National colours and flags may become a “war cry” for football fans, like the Dutch *oranje*, *blanje*, *bleu*. There are thus various combinations of verbal and visual, semantically lexicalised and institutionalised signs. This also holds for **gestures** (*nod*, *shake head* for *yes* or *no*, keep *fingers crossed*, *Daumen halten*, give a *thumbs-up*).

3. Conclusions

To return to verbal signs, at the end, the two processes, also concern loan words and pseudo-loans (like *Friseur*, *Handy*), personal and place **names**, (*Turner.*, *Constable*, *Shakespeare*, *Wagner* and *St.Petersburg*, *Leningrad*, *Kaliningrad*, *Königsberg*), but also semantic transfer (metaphor and metonymy).

Political correctness (PC) plays a role in *Kaufmann*, *Kauffrau*, *chair(person)* for *chairman* – but cf *fireman*, *Feuerwehrmann*, *firefighter*.

In closing, I would like to quote from a talk, given on a lecture tour through the former Czechoslovak Republic, in 1990, from Prague to Brno, in Lipka (1992: 13):

Both notions (ie lexicalization and institutionalisation) must be made more precise ...and lexicalization must be extended. Once we realize this, we cannot help discovering lexicalization and institutionalization everywhere around us, in the languages we use to categorize extralinguistic reality.”

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