

# A Cognitive Study of Deadjectival Nominalization as Shell Nouns in German Language based on German News Corpus

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Shell nouns are considered to be a type of meta-language labels commonly used in English texts, i.e. the fact is that, the belief is that, idea that etc. Such clusters of abstract nouns resembling "shells" are usually accompanied by personal positions as well as evaluation functions, and are relevant to subsequent content with highly generalization. According to Schmidt's grammatical classification of English shell-noun-patterns (2000), namely N-cl and N-be-cl, the corresponding structures i.e. N-cl and N-sein-cl can also be found in German shell nouns. Nevertheless, deadjectival nominalization, which is converted from its adjective such as "gut" – "das Gute" (good - the good thing) and differs from nominal substantives, demonstrates the uniqueness of shell nouns in German language.

In this paper, the following questions will be answered: What does deadjectival nominalization look like in this German news corpus? Is there any striking character about it? What is the cognitive influence on perceiving the news based on cognitive theories?

The study will go through both quantitative and qualitative analysis. With the help of regular expressions, namely *@das \$p=ADJA=1 '*, *dass* and *@das \$p=ADJA=1 sein*, deadjectival nominalization is to be extracted from "Tagesspiegel", a German daily newspaper, which is an online available corpus from 1996 to 2005 on the website [www.dwds.de/](http://www.dwds.de/). With this data, the frequency of N-cl and N-sein-cl as well as the frequency of co-occurrence of each cluster is to be taken into account. And through the qualitative observation from the perspectives of "Cognitive Prominence" and "Figure/Ground Theory", this study tries to make comparison and analysis about the deadjectival shell nouns derived from the original forms and the superlative forms of adjectives. Because of impossibility to account for such linguistic phenomenon based on Talmy's five Principles about time events in "Figure/Ground Theory", I have proposed "Conceptual Principle" to analyze these shell nouns. "Conceptual Principle" means some shell nouns are also considered as concepts that have only personal assessments for the subordinate clause. In other words, the normalized adjectives ("Ground") are served as generalization of an event that is later told ("Figure") as the central meaning of the complex sentence. And according to the semantic prosody to these adjectives, the function of their prominence on perceivers is to be analysed.

So the result reveals that a large number of such shell nouns are derived from superlative adjectives rather than their original forms, such as "das Beste" - "best" (the best thing - best ). Furthermore, this kind of shell nouns correspond with "Conceptual Principle", as the location of "Figure" and "Ground" totally different with what Talmy concluded. And in terms of semantic prosody, the majority of positive forms remain essentially 'neutral', but superlatives are relatively averaged in 'positive' and 'negative'.

From this empirical study, it can be seen that superlatives as marked shell nouns play important roles on characterizing the events behind them as well as increasing more prominent focus on them. To sum up, this paper provides not only new perspectives for the study of deadjectival German shell nouns in the news texts to explain the strengthening phenomenon of information but also enriches the principles about "Figure/Ground Theory" developed by Talmy in order to offer novel justification for the further application of "Cognitive Prominence" as well as "Figure/Ground Theory".

## References

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