

***SPDling, Systemling, Veganling* – A morpho-semantic analysis of new derivations with *-ling* in contemporary German**

We recently realised that the suffix *-ling* (used in e. g., *Neuling*, *Schreiberling*, *Liebling* or *Flüchtling*) is currently experiencing a renaissance being productively used to form new words. Derivations such as *SPDling*, *Systemling* or *Veganling* can be frequently found online. Therefore, the main focus of this paper is the analysis of new derivations with *-ling* in contemporary German. These derivations can be found predominantly in online forums and comments and are used as a designation for people with a derogatory connotation.

The suffix *-ling* is a native German derivational suffix that can be found as a bound grammatical morpheme at the stem of the word and defines gender and class of the word formation (masculine noun). It is a component of complex words that refer mainly to people, while older formations with *-ling* may refer to abstract nouns, animals, mushrooms or plants.

A comparison between older lexicalised formations with *-ling*, which can be found in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch (DWB, The German Dictionary)*¹, and contemporary derivations shows that the number of formations has significantly decreased in the last centuries. A decrease in morphological diversity can also be observed. Firstly, this applies to the word class. The current version of the Duden exclusively includes formations with *-ling* that are realised as nouns. In addition to nouns, the *DWB* also lists adverbs and adjectives (e. g., *ärschling*). Secondly, further derivational options seem to be limited in contemporary German. In the *DWB*, there are a number of derivations that, in turn, use derivatives with *-ling* as their base (e. g., *Günstlingschaft*). Furthermore, nowadays formations with *-ling* can no longer be inflected according to gender, i. e. with the suffix *-in*. The feminine form was possible in the past (e. g., *Flüchtlingin*). Thirdly, the formations of the suffix are now evidently limited in terms of the base of the word formation. Older derivations with *-ling* use verbs, adjectives, nouns and numerals as their bases (see Stricker 2000, p. 275 f.). According to Weinreich (2007, p. 967), later derivations with *-ling* are formed primarily on the basis of simple, monolithic adjectives. In addition, older derivations with *-ling* can also be found with more complex bases (e. g., *Abkömmling*) (see Fleischer/Barz 2012, p. 216 ff.).

Corpus-based studies show that only a small portion of lexicalised references to people using *-ling* have a negative connotation. According to Wellmann (1975, p. 86), merely words such as *Dichterling* or *Reimerling*, the bases of which already refer to people, are derogatory. All other references to people are semantically neutral or were assigned a negative connotation due to the pre-existing derogatory adjective base (e. g., *Dümmling*) (see *ibid.*).

In order to collect new word formations with *-ling*, we have turned to written online sources. The derivations are ad hoc formations that are generally used to refer to (groups of) people. They are more frequent and more productive in certain thematic areas. Firstly,

¹ The *DWB* documents records of written language from the 15th to the 19th century.

they occur in discussions on politics. Examples for this are *AfDling*, *CDUling*, *FDPLing*, *Grünling* and *Linksling* that all refer to supporters or members of political parties. The party names (or parts thereof) are used as the base, independent of their word class or formation. In addition, there are derivations that indirectly refer to a political orientation. One can, for example, find *Gutling*, *Systemling* or *Trumpling*. Secondly, derivations with *-ling* are used in topics related to media or society. In contrast to its original meaning, the term *Tintling*, for example, nowadays refers to a person with tattoos and not to a type of mushroom. Furthermore, there are terms such as *Veganling* and *Fleischling* that refer to people who prefer a plant- or meat-based diet. Thirdly, derivations with *-ling* can be found in fictional contexts, where they refer to beings that exist exclusively in imagined, fictional worlds. Older examples of such word formations are *Erdling*, *Däumling* (see Bechstein [1857] 1997) and *Halbling* (see DWB: Volume 3, p. 774 or Tolkien 1969/1970). More modern derivations include, e. g., *Schlechtling*, *Steinling* or *Drachling*. Moreover, there are indications for the fact that nowadays the older derivation *Menschling* is used with a new meaning.

While morphologically limited formations have increased between the periods of Early New High German and New High German, the opposite seems to apply to new formations. In contrast to older derivations, abbreviations, pronouns or artificial words are also suffixed nowadays. The class of the word formation's product, however, remains limited: All new formations are nouns and almost exclusively refer to people. From a semantic perspective, they differ from their lexicalised predecessors in two aspects: The new formations in political areas or those associated with the media and society as external references always have a negative connotation. The strength of the connotation is contingent on the respective context of use. Also, the reference to traits or actions of the individual is an essential component of the older derivations with *-ling*. In addition, the area of use is not thematically limited. The new derivations with *-ling*, however, refer predominantly to people who are part of a group of people with specific interests, convictions or characteristics. In these cases, the reference to political or societal positions takes centre stage. New '*lings*' reference an association with stereotyped social groups. Beyond that, as external references, they express non-conformance or dissociation with the respective opposing position. New formations in fiction have neither a generally negative connotation nor do they refer to stereotyped social groups. A derogatory connotation only exists among the formations with *-ling* if the base is already negative (e. g., *Schlechtling*).

It is surely not coincidental that these word formations are frequently found in online communication. The new '*lings*' can be used to make derogatory references to people without being understood as disparagements or insults. The authors can use them as external references and declare their rejection without having to fear deletion of their post.

Flüchtling, a significantly older derivation with *-ling*, is also predominantly used in the context of societal-political discussions. The term is used to reference people who seek refuge from war or persecution. A problem of this so-called '*Flüchtlingsdiskussion*' (discussion about the refugee 'problem') is that we often forget what is actually being discussed, namely individual, actual people. Aside from this societal-political discussion on the refugee 'problem', there is also a linguistic discussion about the term *Flüchtling*. The central issue here is whether it is a suitable word. Many people consider the term problematic. This is presumably due to the fact that many former derivations with *-ling* are diminutive and therefore frequently derogatory, despite their neutral base. That some people

prefer the alternative term *Geflüchtete/r* is presumably based on the fact that it is not associated with a derogatory meaning component and that, due to the conversion (v > n) the process of fleeing is central.

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