# Instrument and place nouns from a typological and diachronic perspective

Hans Christian Luschützky (Dept. of Linguistics, University of Vienna)

Franz Rainer (Dept. of Romance Languages, WU Vienna)

In his typological survey of derivational categories, Bauer (2000: 43-44) was surprised to find that instrument-place polysemy occurs more frequently in his sample of 42 languages than agent-instrument polysemy, which is often considered to be a very widespread, if not universal phenomenon (see Luschützky & Rainer in press). In Bauer's sample, 3 out of 7 languages marking both categories use the same marker, whereas 4 languages use distinct markers. In the case of agent and instrument nouns, only 3 out of 10 languages marking both categories use the same marker.

In our contribution, we would like to take up this issue again on a broader empirical basis. In a first step, we will assess the frequency of instrument-place polysemy on the basis of a sample of over 100 languages. It turns out that polysemous markers of this kind are in fact relatively frequent cross-linguistically.

In a second step, we will explore the reasons why these two categories are expressed so often by one and the same marker. As far as we can see, this question has not attracted much attention in the literature. Meyer-Lübke (1894: § 527), for example, pointed out that the place where an action is carried out or occurs can also be conceptualised as the means by which it is carried out or takes place. He therefore considered names of recipients to be the kind of concept where a reinterpretation can take place. Another romanist, Gamillscheg (1921), claimed that the difference between instrument and place nouns was not due to the existence of two suffixes with an instrumental and locative meaning respectively, but a side effect of the meaning of the base verbs on an otherwise unitary suffix, transitive verbs creating instrument nouns and intransitive ones place nouns, roughly speaking (cf. also Namer & Villoing 2008). The idea that instrument and place nouns are in reality one and the same semantic category is also defended by Serbat (1975) who claims, in the spirit of French structuralism, that the instrument-place polysemy is only apparent and can be derived as 'effets de sens' from a more abstract "mediative" meaning, at least as far as the Latin suffix -*culum* is concerned. A closer look at the development of particular markers reveals, however, that these three suggestions, which by the way are in need of a critical assessment themselves, are not sufficient. Other pathways leading to instrument-place polysemy can indeed be identified.

One possibility is certainly the one envisaged by Meyer-Lübke, viz. a direct extension from one semantic category to the other (instrument > place, or place > instrument). A typical instance could be the development of a locative meaning of the suffix -*er* in English, as in *diner*.

Another source for instrument-place polysemy is also semantic in nature, but there is no direct extension from one category to the other. Instrument and place nouns expressed with the same suffix can also arise as a consequence of metonymic extension from action nouns. In German, for example, the suffix -*ung*, which basically forms action nouns, has extended to instrument meaning, as in *Kupplung* 'clutch' (< *kuppeln* 'to connect'), as well as to place meaning, as in *Wohnung* 'flat' (< *wohnen* 'to live in'). In this case, the instrument and place meanings are cognates of the action noun ancestor.

A third source for the polysemy in question is ellipsis. In complex nominals consisting of a noun and a relational adjective, the head noun may be left out, its meaning being transferred to the marker of the remaining adjective. This is what happened in the case of Latin -*orium*, which forms both instrument and place nouns: *cinctorium* 'girdle' vs. *dormitorium* 'dormitory', etc.

A further source seems to be homonymisation of originally distinct markers. A case in point could be the fate of the Semitic markers *mi-* and *ma-*, which form instrument and place nouns, respectively, in Classical Arabic, while in other Semitic languages one of the two markers has been generalised for both meanings.

The last pathway we have been able to identify is borrowing. For example, the locative meaning of English -*er*, as in *counter*, derives from French *comptoir*.

It turns out that instrument-place polysemy is not a unitary phenomenon from a diachronic point of view (for a similar conclusion concerning agent-instrument polysemy see Luschützky & Rainer in press). From this it follows that a synchronic-typological account of polysemy must be supplemented with diachronic investigation in order to gain full understanding of the phenomenon.

## References

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