Bernhard Haidacher (Innsbruck)

The concept of *confix* in German, French, and Italian – a comparative study[1]

Despite some critical voices, in German linguistics the concept of *confix* can meanwhile be considered as an established morpheme category. Schmidt (1987) introduced the term into German to describe bound morphemes that are lexical, but not inflectable. Since the 2000s, an increasing number of publications deal with the phenomenon and the term has begun to enter linguistic reference works as well. In French, the situation is completely different due to the structure of the language (poor in compounds and mostly post-determinative). Although the term and the concept have originally been coined by the French structuralist André Martinet ([1961] ³1980), the denomination itself is barely present in Romance linguistics. French researchers usually take different approaches to discuss the phenomenon (e.g., *neoclassical compounds*, *constructed lexemes*). In Italian, the denominations *confisso/confissazione* are first used by De Mauro (1999), who adopts both the term and concept directly from Martinet; moreover, they can be found in some contributions on word formation and lexicology (e.g., Adamo/Della Valle 2008). Nevertheless, the Italian terminology remains heterogeneous, with some researchers still using the terms *prefissoide/suffissoide* coined by Migliorini (1963). As I will show by comparing the languages in question, the terminology and the concept of *confixes* vary greatly between Romance and Germanic languages.

Keywords: *Morphology*; *confixes*; *word-formation*; *theoretical and contrastive linguistics*; *German/French/Italian*;

1   Introduction

Nowadays, linguistic elements such as *bio-*, *hydro-*, *agro-* or *biblio-* are not only essential components of the terminology of special languages, but are also integrated into words used in everyday language. These foreign morphemes are used to form neologisms, and mostly come from classical languages (Latin or Greek), where they were originally words. They have attracted the attention of

---

linguists working on German, French, and Italian as well, and are mostly treated in the realm of foreign word-formation (e.g., Dal/Amiot 2008; Villoing 2012; Amiot 2020).

Especially in Romance languages, there is an abundance of different names for the elements in question: e.g., *formants*, *formant elements*, *combining forms*, *affixoids*, *suffixoids*, *prefixoids*, etc. Meanwhile, in German philology, the term *Konfix* for such bound elements is well established and is a fixture of traditional grammar, even if the discussion surrounding the phenomenon is not unanimous (e.g., Eins 2008; Donalies 2009).

In recent years, alongside the prototypical, i.e. *langue*-based approach to the subject, there are also other, *parole*-based angles from which to treat the phenomenon (e.g., Michel 2009 or Elsen/Michel 2007) in order to account also for marginal (non-prototypical) cases of related morphemes.

This article provides an overview of what is currently known about confixes in German, French, and Italian linguistics and compares the different theoretical approaches. This comparison will show that the broadly developed German concept of *Konfix* could also be applied to Romance languages to the benefit of linguistic description and theory.

2 The notion of confix in German

2.1 The linguistic theory behind the phenomenon

The philologist Günter Dietrich Schmidt introduced the term *Konfix* to German linguistics in 1987 to describe bound morphemes that are lexical, but not inflectable. In Schmidt's approach, confixes are special cases of *Kombineme* (confixes and affixes), namely *Stammkombineme*, and he uses this model to differentiate bound morphemes from affixes according to the criteria

Basisfähigkeit[2] and/or *Kompositionsgliedfähigkeit*[3] (cf. Schmidt 1987: 50). In German philology, meanwhile, numerous publications have addressed the concept of *confix(es)* (cf. Donalies 2000, 2005, 2009; Elsen 2005, 2013a, 2013b; Michel 2009; Müller 2015a, 2015b; Müller et al. 2015) and the term is adopted in German reference works (e.g., Metzler Lexikon Sprache 2016) as well. Thus, it can be said that the morpheme category is established in German linguistic research: «Bereits nach ungefähr zwölf Jahren war die Kategorie demnach in der deutschen Forschung anerkannt […]» (Gehlen 2016: 4-5; 'The [morpheme] category was accepted in German philology after just approximately twelve years […]'). However, the discussion of the phenomenon in German linguistics is not unanimous, and there are also critical voices (cf. Eins 2008, 2015[4]; Donalies 2009; Gehlen 2016). One frequently criticized issue is that even generally accepted defining criteria are assessed differently for prototypical examples of the morpheme category confix, and the dividing line between them and word-forming elements with similar functions has been blurred until now.

According to Michel (2009: 97), starting from a *langue*-based concept[5] of prototypical confixes within the framework of traditional grammar, the characteristics *Gebundenheit*, *lexikalisch-begriffliche Bedeutung*, *Wortartvariabilität*, *freies Vorkommen in anderen Sprach(stuf)en*, *topologische Variabilität*, and *potentielle Produktivität*[6] can generally be regarded as representative of the class.

---

[2] Literally translated, the criterion *Basisfähigkeit* refers to a morpheme's 'ability to function as a base', i.e. to function as a word stem and to form derivates when combined with affixes.

[3] Meanwhile, *Kompositionsgliedfähigkeit* describes the 'ability [of the bound morphemes in question] to function as an element of a compound'.

[4] Eins (2008, 2015) proposes to renounce the term, because in his view it is obsolete.

[5] In addition, he describes a *parole*-based view of the morpheme class, which focuses on the dynamic aspect(s) of the language and also takes into consideration non-prototypical representatives.

[6] *Gebundenheit* literally means 'being bound' in contrast to being a free morpheme.
Lexikalisch-begriffliche Bedeutung means 'lexical-conceptual meaning'. Having concrete meaning differentiates (prototypically) confixes from affixes.
Wortartvariabilität refers to their ability to form words belonging to different word classes.
Freies Vorkommen in anderen Sprach(stuf)en refers to their 'occurrence as free words in other languages or at other language levels'.
Topologische Variabilität 'topological versatility' refers to the ability of a number of confixes of taking different positions (initial or final) within the words they are part of.

2.2 Differentiation between confixes and other word-formation units

The criteria of the morpheme class described above allow us to differentiate it from similar phenomena. Table 1 exhibits the differences between (the) various elements of word formation.

Item \ Criteria	Word	Short word	Affix	Affixoid	Unical item	Confix
Being bound	-	-/(+)	+	+	+	**+/(-)**
Ability to function as a base	+	+	-	+/-	-	**+**
Lexical-conceptual meaning	+	+	-	+/-	-	**+**
Topological versatility	+	+	-	-	-	**+/-**
Variability of word class	+	+	-	+/-	-	**+**
Potential creativity	+	+	+/-	+	-	**+**

Tab. 1: The differences between confixes and other word-formation units (Michel 2009: 97).

2.3 Confixes vs. combining forms

Hilke Elsen (2005: 134-138), another German researcher dealing with confixes, presents a flexible set of criteria for defining them and for differentiating the respective morpheme class from similar ones (e.g., *affixes*, *affixoids* and *combining forms*). Her merit consists in the observation that confixes and combining forms, although similar, are not identical and thus are to be distinguished from each other: «Hier sei betont, dass 'combining form' und Konfix auseinanderzuhalten sind, auch wenn sie über eine große Menge gemeinsamer Elemente [scil. Charakteristika] verfügen» (Elsen 2013a: 91, 'In this context, it is necessary to stress that the terms 'combining form' and 'Konfix' must be

---

Potentielle Produktivität denotes their 'potential productivity', i.e. the fact that they may form neologisms.

differentiated from one another even though they have many elements [i.e. characteristics] in common').

In table 2, I summarize the most important divergences between confixes and combining forms according to Elsen (2013b: 30):

Characteristic	Combining form	Confix
Lexical?	Yes	Yes
Productive?	Yes	Yes
Bound?	No, not necessarily	Yes, constituting
Stem/Base morpheme?	No, not necessarily	Yes, constituting
Suffigable?	No, must not	Yes, can

Tab. 2: Confixes versus combining forms – characteristic feature(s).

2.4   Critical voices on the subject of confixes in German philology

Although the term and the concept of *confix* have become established elements of German grammar, some scholars are nevertheless critical or outright dismissive with regard to this morpheme category. Eins (2015: 65-90), for example, recommends in his article «Alter Wein in neuen Schläuchen? Zum Konfix» discarding the category of confix and is convinced that: «Das Konfix selbst ist als Morphemkategorie obsolet» (ibid.: 87, 'The confix itself is an obsolete morpheme category'). The word-formation process of recomposing, in contrast, is of some interest to him (cf. id.). Another German linguist, Elke Donalies, who more or less supports the concept of confix, provocatively states the following: «Vielleicht verabschieden wir uns […] vom Terminus Konfix zu lat. 'configere' 'aneinander heften' und finden etwas Sprechenderes» (2009: 60, 'Perhaps we should bid […] the term confix, which comes from the Latin 'configere' meaning 'to stick together', farewell and find a more telling name').

2.5 The state of the art in German philology

In recent years, in addition to the traditional definition of confixes, a *parole-*based approach, as advocated by Michel (2009), has emerged and is gaining in popularity. This alternative viewpoint takes into account not just the prototypical representatives of the class, which share all its characteristics, but also elements to which not all definition criteria apply. This way of proceeding permits to consider also *un-prototypical* elements, which are at the transition to adjacent word-units. For Michel this dynamic way of interpreting is necessary to have a flexible *definition-raster*, which covers the full continuum of prototypical and un-prototypical representatives of the morpheme category (cf. 2009: 123-133). The formation patterns of confixes in German linguistics are generally relegated to the realm of borrowed and foreign word-formation.

However, scant attention is paid to neoclassical compounding, because German is a language rich in compounds, and with regard to neoclassical compounds there is no inversion of word-order compared to native compounds. Peter Otto Müller (2015a), a researcher in the field of foreign word-formation in German, describes the following formation models of 'confix-constructed words' on the basis of a broader concept of the phenomenon: according to him, complex words formed by 'confix + lexeme', 'lexeme + confix', or 'confix + confix' are compounds, while he regards lexemes formed by 'confix + suffix' as derivative(s) (cf. 2015a: 1623-1624).

3   The term and concept in French linguistics

3.1 Different linguistic structure

First of all, it can be stated that the various word-formation processes do not have the same importance in Romance languages as they do in Germanic languages. In contrast to German, the French language, for example – as is generally true of the Romance languages – is not rich in compounds and is characterized by its post-determinative formations. This structural difference leads French linguists to take a different scholarly approach to the phenomenon

than their German-speaking colleagues. Therefore, although the term *confix* is known in French linguistics, it is rarely used.

3.2 André Martinet and the characteristics of the term in his definition

The French structuralist André Martinet is generally seen as the originator of the concept of *confix*, which he introduced and elaborated in his work *Grammaire fonctionnelle du français* (1979). However, the terms *confixe* and *confixation* themselves have already been mentioned by him some years before:

> On a là une situation linguistique particulière qui ne s'identifie ni avec la composition proprement dite, ni, de façon générale, avec la dérivation qui suppose la composition d'éléments de statut différent. On peut parler ici de *confixation*, chacun des éléments d'un synthème comme *thermostat* étant désigné comme un *confixe*. (Martinet [1961] ³1980: 135).[7]

Martinet's studies regarding confixes focus on «compounds» formed by two classical morphemes belonging to the same language (e.g., *philosophe*, *psychologue*, etc.).[8] He names this pattern of word-formation *confixation* (cf. 1979: 20). In his subsequent work entitled *Syntaxe Générale* (1985: 35), he observes combinations of bound and free morphemes (hybrid formations), whereby the elements in question are borrowed from different languages and not just from Greek or Latin. According to Martinet's definition of *confixes*, the following criteria are of particular relevance: the elements in question come mostly from Greek or Latin, the compounds are right-headed[9], the presence of a linking vowel is given (*-o-* for Greek and *-i-* for Latin) and the bound morphemes can take a variable position (initial, final or both) in a given word. However, already at that

---

[7] 'This is a particular linguistic situation which can neither be identified as a composition proper nor, in a general way, as a derivation which implies being composed of elements of varying status. One might use the term *confixation*, given that each of the elements of synthemes like *thermostat* are labelled *confixes*.'

[8] «En principe ne devraient être associés que deux éléments grecs ou deux éléments latins: *polyglotte,* mais *plurilingue.*» (Martinet 1979: 244, 'In principle, only two Greek or two Latin elements should be combined with each other: either *polyglot* or *multilingual*').

[9] Compounds in Romance languages are usually left-headed.

time the French linguist recognizes the importance of this word-formation process for neology and lexicology (cf. Martinet 1979: 244).

To sum up, the merit of Martinet is not that of having 'created two new terms', but of having identified and introduced a new concept. He noticed that there were some linguistic elements which had not yet been categorized until then and are difficult to analyze with traditional methods. For these reasons, he hypothesized an own morpheme category and a corresponding word-formation process.

3.3   Rostislav Kocourek

Subsequently, the term *confix* is taken up by the Czech-Canadian terminologist Rostislav Kocourek in his work *La langue française de la technique et de la science* ([1982] ²1991). The alternative name *formation savante*, which he uses likewise (cf. 1982: 108), has been the common term in French linguistics up to the present. But this denomination does not refer to all language registers. In addition, Kocourek discusses difficulties in distinguishing *confixation* from *affixation* and that neither the term *interfixation* nor *formation savante* accurately describe the phenomenon in question (cf. 1991: 127). He has difficulty categorizing not just the word-formation process, but also the bound elements themselves, because he does not see clear distinguishing characteristics between *affixes* and *confixes*. One distinctive feature is that affixes cannot combine with each other, while confixes can (e.g., *hydrophile* or *hydrophyte*). The terminologist therefore also uses the general term *formants* to avoid further problems in specifying the bound morphemes in question. However, this denomination (*formant(s)*) is a hypernym, which includes various linguistic elements from different grammatical classes (e.g., *endings*, *affixes*, *confixes* or *particles*) (cf. id.).

3.4 Interfixes and interfixation in the grammar of Michel Arrivé, Françoise Gadet and Michel Galmiche

In their work *Grammaire d'aujourd'hui* (1986), the French linguists Michel Arrivé, Françoise Gadet and Michel Galmiche introduce the class of *interfixes* and the corresponding word formation pattern which they call *interfixation*. Not only do they use different names for the morpheme category in question – their methodical procedure is also distinct from that of other scholars (cf. Arrivé/Gadet/Galmiche 1986: 340).

The authors (1986) focus on the word-formation process of *interfixation*, whereby they coined the term. In their further discussions, they emphasize the Latin or Greek origin of *interfixes* and these languages' linking vowels (*-i* or *-o*). Moreover, they observe the inverted word order of the complex words built by interfixation and describe their etymological homogeneity. They also outline hybrid formations that contain etymological elements of both Greek and Latin, e.g., *sociologie*. Then they mention pair formations, first in the Latin form, and then in the Greek one, e.g., *plurilingue* and *polyglotte* (cf. ibid.: 340-341). Finally, their remarks on *interfix-formations* with English elements are not very clear. However, the authors subdivide the group of *interfixes* with regard to their position in the complex word (e.g., initial, final or variable), but some of their classifications do appear to be flawed. For example, for them, the suffix *-cide* is a(n) interfix in «position finale» (ibid.: 341).

3.5 Confixes and confixation in current French research (grammatical theory)

3.5.1 Neoclassical compounding

The French researchers Georgette Dal and Dany Amiot (2008: 1-5)[10] deal with the phenomenon within the framework of neoclassical composition and name the bound morphemes in question *constituants néoclassiques*[11]. In their analyses,

---

[10] I refer to a PDF version diverging in page numbering (1-18).
[11] ECNC = Éléments de construction néoclassiques (Dal/Amiot 2008: 5, ʻneoclassical building elementsʼ).

they describe two types of compounding: *la composition populaire* and *la composition néoclassique*, whereby French neoclassical compounds are characterized by at least one neoclassical constituent and are right-headed (word order YX). The neoclassical constituent, as it is called, corresponds basically to the *German* concept of the confix (cf. id.). To designate the neoclassical constituents, Dal/Amiot list different names: *formants*, *éléments de formation*, *combining forms*, *quasi-morphèmes*, *affixoïdes*, *confixes*, *pseudo-affixes*, *semi-mots* , *sous-mots*, etc. (cf. ibid.: 3). Regarding this type of not ordinary composition another name that they use is *composition savante*. Hereby, the attribute *savant* 'learned', which is often used in French articles dealing with this topic, can be differently interpreted: on the one hand it may refer to the word order (neoclassical word order), on the other hand it marks the Latin-Greek origin of the elements. Additionally, *savant* indicates the learned language users and the academic fields of knowledge in which the complex words were originally employed (cf. ibid.: 4).

Apart from neoclassical compounds, they discuss *constructed words* in *Yculture,* in *Yforme*, and in *Ythérapie* with the following characteristics: (neoclassical) word order YX and a linking vowel (cf. ibid.: 4-10). Complex words – formed according to this pattern (placeholder Y (= variable = determinans) + invariable right-constituent X (= determinatum)) – have a final neoclassical element and enter in the construction of large series of lexemes. In their comments the variable Y is not specified, and the focus lies on the right-headed constituents of the complex words. Overall, the two authors concentrate their studies on the formation process of the complex words, while the word formation units are not of central interest. In her recent research on the phenomenon, Amiot (2020: 1900-1901) introduces the term *combining forms* for the neoclassical constituents and differentiates them from affixes. Additionally, she deals with the semantics of confixes (e.g., double forms: one Greek morpheme and the other from Latin). Finally, she mentions their ability to form derivatives (e.g., *hydrique*).

3.5.2 The constructed lexeme (in the realm of constructional morphology)

Marine Lasserre and Fabio Montermini, two other French researchers dealing with NCs (*neoclassical compounds*), have adopted the abstract approach of constructional morphology for their studies (cf. Lasserre/Montermini 2014a). At the beginning of their analyses, they deplore the absence of a satisfactory taxonomy of neoclassical elements in current research and criticize their heterogeneous status in French dictionaries. Up to the present, these morphemes do not receive a unified treatment in French lexicography, in particular concerning their status and their name(s): Are they lexemes, affixes, or another category? (cf. ibid.: 1797).[12] Using the example of *-logie*, they show that this morpheme is called an *élément formant* dans le *TLFi*, while it is referred to as an *élément entrant dans la composition* and as a *suffixe* in the *Grand Robert*. (cf. id.). Mostly, the bound morphemes in question are qualified as *formants* or *formant elements*; these are generic denominations which are applicable to a wide range of different linguistic elements. Moreover, they observe – like other linguists – that today NCs are not necessarily linked to a savant subject and focus on their massive presence in everyday language. In this context, they show the high frequency of *-cide* and *-phobe* in a Google-based corpus (cf. ibid.: 1798). They remember that the word order YX (neoclassical word order) is not unique to neoclassical compounding, but one can find it also in other complex lexemes, where at least one constituent has no syntactic realization in French (cf. ibid.: 1800). In the next step of their analyses, they divide neoclassical compounds into different subtypes according to the recurrent final constituent, whereby they concentrate on formations in *Xthérapie* and in *Xcratie* (cf. ibid.: 1800-1801).

---

[12] In the meantime, in French many authors differentiate between *confixes* and *affixes*: «Cependant, même s'il existe des cas ambigus […], il existe aussi des cas clairs où les différences entre les deux types de forme sont bien marquées […]» (Amiot 2020: 1900, 'However, even if there are ambiguous cases […], there are also clear cases where the differences between the two types of form are marked clearly […]'). I do not completely agree with the differentiation criteria mentioned by Amiot. Firstly, the distinguishing feature of the topological versatility (in contrast to affixes) does not apply to all confixes. Secondly, the semantic vs. grammatical distinction (confixes vs. affixes) is not always marked as prototypical, but Amiot (2020) implies this by referring to the earlier word status of confixes.

Regarding semantics, they notice that the interpretation of the meaning of the complex words can sometimes differ from the single constituents and depends on a variety of factors: «D'un point de vue sémantique, des lexèmes formés avec le même élément final non autonome peuvent recevoir plusieurs interprétations différentes, avec une gamme de sens pour chaque type de composé qui ne sont pas forcément liées synchroniquement.» (ibid.: 1801).[13] On this occasion, their observations on double forms (e.g., *-forme* vs. *-morphique*) are of particular interest, because the Latin and Greek morphemes are in direct competition (cf. ibid.: 1802). This is an aspect that I also follow in my research, because the concept of *water* has at the same time one Latin (*aqua-*) and one Greek realization (*hydro-*).[14] In this regard, I am convinced that there are semantic and distributional differences between the two forms, because usually only partially synonymous elements do continue existing over the time.

According to Lasserre/Montermini, differentiation criteria between neoclassical elements and other morphological-constructional units can be found in distributional, semantic, and formal aspects. With regard to the *potential* topological versatility of confixes, the authors observe their specialization on a fixed position in new formations. At the same time, they point out that the exclusive distributional interpretation of diverging semantics of isomorphic elements neglects the context, historical-linguistic factors or the influence of the meaning of the other constituents. To differentiate the group of neoclassical elements from affixes, they refer to the dichotomy *lexical* vs. *grammatical*. Concerning formal criteria, they assign *grosso modo* the linking vowel to the first element of the complex lexeme(s) (cf. ibid.: 1803-1806).

To sum up, it should be noted that Lasserre/Montermini (2014a) deal with the phenomenon in a strictly synchronous manner within the abstract schema of constructional morphology, in which there are no specific categories (e.g., *confixes*, *affixoids*, etc.). I am therefore convinced that their constructional approach has not been appropriated in traditional grammar and is not helpful for specifying the elements in question. However, the observations of the two

---

[13] 'From a semantic point of view, lexemes formed with the same non-autonomous final element can be interpreted in several different ways, with a range of meanings for each type of compound which are not necessarily linked synchronously'.

[14] In the GGHF, Amiot (2020: 1901) considers this aspect, but calls the two confixes in question «radicaux supplétifs» 'suppletive roots'.

scholars, particularly regarding semantics, are of major interest, whereby they explore this aspect in depth in their paper «How is the meaning of complex lexemes constructed?»:

> Rather, we claim that, from a semantic point of view, a word formation process does not consist primarily of the combination of two or more discrete units (e.g., a base and an affix) but of the inclusion of a new lexeme into a lexical network to which other constructed words by the same pattern also belong (Lasserre/Montermini 2014b: 157).

4 The morpheme category in Italian

4.1 The introduction of the term by Tullio De Mauro

For Italian the morpheme category confix was directly adopted from André Martinet by Tullio De Mauro in his lexicographical reference work GRADIT:

> **confisso** […] morfo isolabile in parole composte, spec. come primo o ultimo elemento (ad es. *radio-* e *-fonia* in *radiofonia*, *tele-* in *televisione*), dotato di un autonomo significato lessicale, spesso capace di apparire come parola libera (ad es., in it., *radio* per 'apparecchio radiofonico' [radiofonia], *tele* per 'televisione') e per lo più di origine greca o latina DER. Confissazione SIN. ipon. prefissoide, suffissoide […] (1999: s.v. *confisso*).[15]

Because of the authority of this well-known dictionary, the terms *confisso/confissazione*[16] and the concept of the French linguist André Martinet entered into Italian language and lexicography. Nevertheless, even De Mauro remembers the terms *prefissoide* and *suffissoide* – as coined by the Italian linguist

---

[15] '**confix** […] can isolable morph in a compound word, especially as first or last element (e.g., *radio-* and *-fonia* in *radiofonia* 'radiophony', *tele-* in *televisione* 'television'), has an independent lexical meaning, is often capable of standing for itself as a free word (e.g., in it., radio for 'apparecchio radiofonico' 'radio set' [radiophony], *tele* for 'televisione' [television]), usually of Greek or Latin origin DER. Confixation SIN. hypon. prefixoid, suffixoid […] (1999: s.v. *confix*)'

[16] «confissazione […] formazione di parole mediante confissi.» (GRADIT 1999: s.v. *confissazione*, 'confixation […] formation of words using confixes'). Additionally, it is interesting that De Mauro takes the term *confisso* from Martinet's work *Sintassi generale* (1988) (cf. id.) and not from Martinet's standard reference work *Grammaire fonctionnelle du français* (1979), where the concept is treated in detail.

Bruno Migliorini – and sees them as synonyms for the bound morphemes in question. His defining criteria for the category of confixes are clear: they are (bound) morphemes, have a lexical-conceptual meaning, and are characterized by distributional particularities. However, in contrast to De Mauro, I don't think that confixes often appear as *free words*: It is important to bear in mind that the examples given by him are real words, built by the word-formation process of shortening. Thus, they are only isomorphic and homophonic to the corresponding confixes, which remain bound morphemes.

4.2 The *confisso* in the lexicographical work of Giovanni Adamo and Valeria Della Valle

Subsequently, the two Italian dictionarists, Giovanni Adamo and Valeria Della Valle (2008), adopted the designations (and the concept) *confissi/confissazione* for their lexicographical work following the French model (cf. Adamo/Della Valle 2008: XXIX). However, they integrate the bound elements exclusively in the framework of neoclassical compounding and underline their significant role for neology (cf. ibid.: XX). In their classification of the morpheme category, they subdivide confixes on the basis of formal criteria (e.g., monosyllabic, disyllabic or trisyllabic) and distinguish classical from *modern* elements. In addition, they differentiate these morphemes according to their position in the word (initial or final) (cf. ibid.: XXIX-XXX). But their descriptions contain terminological inconsistencies and are at times ambiguous. For example, they also use other names for these (bound) morphemes: *elementi formanti* or *formativi*, *spezzoni di parole*, *suffissoidi* and *prefissoidi*, *semiparola* o *stem* (cf. ibid.: XXIX). The ambivalence is evident, when they name the word-formation process of *agroambiente* confixation, but at the same time they still have access to the terminology of Migliorini (1935)[17] by denoting the confix *agro-* a *prefissoide*, and

---

[17] «Nel 1935 Bruno Migliorini li denominò *suffissoidi* e *prefissoidi*, proprio per alludere alla loro funzionalità plastica, che permette di preporli o posporli a «qualsiasi termine de lessico che semanticamente lo consenta› (Migliorini, 1990, p. 121).» (Adamo/Della Valle 2017: 75, 'In 1935 Bruno Migliorini named them *suffixoids* and *prefixoids* in order to allude

additionally *agro-* and *ambiente* are called *formanti* (cf. ONLI 2019: s.v. *agroambiente*, accessed 03/01/2022).

In recent publications Adamo considers these bound morphemes because of their (omni-)presence and diffusion in the technical and scientific vocabular of many different languages in Europe and world-wide, as potential *europeisms* or even *internationalisms*:

> Il processo di formazione più seguìto si avvale di elementi di origine classica e s'impianta contemporaneamente nelle varie lingue di cultura a partire dai secoli XVII e XVIII, nel passaggio dall'uso colto e scientifico della lingua Latina alle diverse lingue nazionali, in modo da uniformare e render più facile la circolazione di termini delle scienze e delle tecniche in ambito europeo e poi internazionale […] (Adamo/Della Valle 2017: 75-76).[18]

4.3 Combining forms, neoclassical compounding and foreign word-formation in Italian linguistics

Overall, regarding Italian linguistics, there are similarities to French research, because most Italian scientists deal with the phenomenon in the realm of neoclassical compounding (e.g., Adamo/Della Valle 2008; Iacobini 2015). In recent research, Iacobini (2015) does not use the concept of confixes, but integrates the elements in question into the framework of foreign word-formation. According to him, because of the growing importance of technical and scientific progress many modern languages use elements and formative patterns which are more or less foreign to the usual word-formation rules (cf. Iacobini 2015: 1661-1662). He calls the bound morphemes in question *combining*

---

to their plastic functionality, which allows them to be prefixed or postfixed to 'any term of the lexicon that semantically permits it').

[18] 'The most commonly followed formation process uses elements of classical origins while simultaneously being introduced into the various languages of culture. This began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during the transition from the formal and scientific use of Latin to the dominant use of various national languages, in order to standardize and facilitate the circulation of scientific and technical terms throughout Europe and then internationally […]'.

forms (CFs), whereas Elsen (2005, 2013a, 2013b) has shown that the English term is not entirely identical with the German concept of confixes (cf. 2.3).

To sum up, regarding the current state of Italian linguistics, it can be stated that the category of *confix* is known, and the relevant terms are to some extent in use, particularly in lexicography (cf. Adamo/Della Valle 2008, 2017; GRADIT 1999). However, the terminology is heterogeneous – even in dictionaries – and the focus of the corresponding studies lies on the word-formation pattern, namely on neoclassical compounding. Moreover, I do not agree with the term *combining forms* to name the class of confixes, as Iacobini (2015) does. With regard to the semantics of the bound morphemes in question, the literature is scant and the aspect of semantic change receives only marginal attention.

5   A comparison of the morpheme category between the languages

As stated above, in the meantime, the *German* concept of *confix* – even if differently and critically discussed there – is well elaborated, and Romance languages would benefit from adopting it on various levels. Particularly in the French language, the term of the French linguist André Martinet is nearly ignored and the seeming equivalence of the so-called combining forms is widespread in Romance linguistics. In table 3 below the similarities and divergences regarding confixes between German, French, and Italian are summarized.

	German	French	Italian
Morpheme category confix	existing/in use (in traditional grammar)	known; but rarely/not in use	received; partially in use (especially in lexicography)
Morpheme category established	yes	no	no
Originator (of the term in the relevant language)	Günter Dietrich Schmidt (referring to Kocourek)	André Martinet	Tullio De Mauro (referring to Martinet)

Focus of research on the (single) **bound morphemes**	yes	to a lesser extent/no (focus on constructed lexemes)	to a lesser extent/if so, then in lexicographical works
Focus on word-formation process	to a lesser extent/no	nearly solely (neoclassical compounding; confixation)	nearly solely (neoclassical compounding; confixation)
Type of word-formation process	compounding and derivation	neoclassical compounding	neoclassical compounding (center of interest)
Inverted word-order/ modifier+head/right-headed compounds	no inverted word-order (German compounds are always right-headed; modifier + head)	yes	yes
Lexicographical reception	yes	no	partially
Terminology	homogeneous	heterogeneous	heterogeneous (and ambiguous)
Differentiating between confixes and combining forms	yes	no	no
Studies on the semantics of confixes and the corresponding complex words	yes (rarely)	yes	rarely

Tab. 3: The reception of *confixes* in German, French and Italian.

6   Conclusion

As it is shown in this article, the phenomenon of confixes is known to German, French and Italian scientific discourse, but to varying extents, and is treated differently in the linguistic theory of each of these languages. To summarize: the German, French, and Italian languages have very different structures, which is why other phenomena and concepts dominate the discussion around word-

formation processes. The original *invention* of the French linguist André Martinet has therefore wielded far greater influence in the linguistics of Germanic than of Romance languages. The term and concept of *confixes*, introduced by Schmidt (1987) to German linguistics, has meanwhile become well established in traditional grammar, even if differently discussed. In this context, one should also take into consideration that the discourse on the phenomenon is not so homogeneous as sometimes described. In addition to prototypical representatives of the group, there are also borderline cases which are not so easy to classify, and whose characteristics overlap with other groups. A *parole*-based approach, such as the one proposed by Michel (2009), helps therefore to categorize linguistic elements that border on similar classes and thus are difficult to classify. German research leads the discussion in this respect as well.

In Romance philology, however, both the term and concept of *confixes*, despite having been coined by André Martinet, are nearly ignored and the phenomenon is first and foremost dealt with in the realm of neoclassical compounding and constructional morphology. Moreover, there are terminological inconsistencies, and the involved researchers focus mainly on the right constituents of complex lexemes (e.g., *Ythérapie*, *Yculture*, *Yforme*, etc.), whereas the variable Y is not specified. For Italian, lexicographers (e.g., Tullio De Mauro or Giovanni Adamo and Valeria Della Valle) are the foremost utilizers of the term *confix* in their works. Apart from that, the terminology of Migliorini (*prefixoid*, *suffixoid*) is still in use in Italian linguistics. Iacobini, who is specialized in the field of foreign word-formation (for Italian), calls the elements in question *combining forms*, whereas Elsen has shown that the two phenomena (*confixes* and *combining forms*) have to be differentiated from each other.

The semantics of confixes, which are sometimes polysemous and whose meaning often depends on the other constituents of the complex lexemes and on the context, should be more emphasized in future studies of the category. In addition, Romance languages could benefit from the findings of German research in this field.

References

Adamo, Giovanni; Della Valle, Valeria. 2008. *Il Vocabolario Treccani. Neologismi. Parole nuove dai giornali*. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana.

-----. 2017. *Che cos'è un neologismo*. Roma: Carocci.

Amiot, Dany. 2020. «Procédés morphologiques de création grammaticale». In: Marchello-Nizia, Christiane; Combettes, Bernard; Prévost, Sophie; Scheer, Tobias (edd.): *Grande grammaire historique du Français (GGHF)*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter Mouton, 1894-1927.

Arrivé, Michel; Gadet, Françoise; Galmiche, Michel. 1986. *La grammaire d'auhourd'hui: guide alphabétique de linguistique française*. Paris: Flammarion.

Dal, Georgette; Amiot, Dany. 2008. «Composition néoclassique en français et ordre des constituants». In: Amiot, Dany (ed.): *La composition dans une perspective typologique*. Arras: Artois Presses Université, 89-113.

Donalies, Elke. 2000. «Das Konfix. Zur Definition einer zentralen Einheit der deutschen Wortbildung». In: *Deutsche Sprache*. Vol. 28, N°2, 144-159.

-----. 2005. *Die Wortbildung des Deutschen: ein Überblick*. Tübingen: Narr.

-----. 2009. «Stiefliches Geofaszintainment – Über Konfixtheorien». In: Müller, Peter O. (ed.): *Studien zur Fremdwortbildung*. Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Olms, 41-64.

Eins, Wieland. 2008. *Muster und Konstituenten der Lehnwortbildung. Das Konfix-Konzept und seine Grenzen*. Hildesheim: Olms.

-----. 2015. «Alter Wein in neuen Schläuchen? Zum Konfix». In: Müller, Peter O. (ed.): *Studien zur Fremdwortbildung*. Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Olms, 65-90.

Elsen, Hilke. 2005. «Deutsche Konfixe». In: *Deutsche Sprache*. Vol. 33, 133-140.

-----. 2013a. «Problemzonen der Wortbildung und der Eintrag im Wörterbuch». In: Klosa, Annette (ed.): *Wortbildung im elektronischen Wörterbuch*. Tübingen: Narr, 87-104.

-----. 2013b. «Zwischen Simplex und komplexem Wort – eine holistische Sichtweise». In: Born, Joachim; Pöckl, Wolfgang (edd.): *„Wenn die Ränder ins Zentrum drängen ...". Außenseiter in der Wortbildung(sforschung)*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 25-42.

Elsen, Hilke; Michel, Sascha. 2007. «Wortbildung im Sprachgebrauch: Desiderate und Perspektiven einer etablierten Forschungsrichtung». In: *Muttersprache*. Vol. 117, 1-16.

Gehlen, Joachim. 2016. *Vom Konfix zum Wort. Unter welchen Bedingungen geht eine solche Morphembewegung vonstatten? Eine theoretische und analytische Arbeit am Beispiel des freien Vorkommens von bio-, öko- und turbo- in Zeitungen*. München: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität.

GGHF = Marchello-Nizia, Christiane; Combettes, Bernard; Prévost, Sophie; Scheer, Tobias (edd.). 2020. *Grande grammaire historique du Français (GGHF)*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter Mouton.

Glück, Helmut; Rödel, Michael (edd.). ⁵2016. *Metzler Lexikon Sprache*. Stuttgart: Metzler.

GRADIT = De Mauro, Tullio. 1999. *Grande Dizionario Italiano dell'Uso*. Torino: UTET.

Iacobini, Claudio. 2015. «Foreign word-formation in Italian». In: Müller, Peter O.; Ohnheiser, Ingeborg; Olsen, Susan; Rainer, Franz (edd.): *Word-Formation HSK 40.3: An International Handbook of the Languages of Europe.* Berlin, New York and Boston: de Gruyter, Vol. 3, 1660-1679.

Kocourek, Rostislav. 1982. *La langue française de la technique et de la science.* Wiesbaden: Brandstetter.

-----. ²1991. *La langue française de la technique et de la science.* Wiesbaden: Brandstetter.

Lasserre, Marine; Montermini, Fabio. 2014a. «Pour une typologie des lexèmes construits: entre composition, composition néoclassique et affixation». In: Neveu, Franck; Blumenthal, Peter; Hriba, Linda; Gerstenberg, Annette; Meinschaefer, Judith; Prévost, Sophie (edd.): *Actes du 4ᵉ Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française (CMLF 2014).* Paris: Institut de Linguistique Française, 1797-1812.

Lasserre, Marine; Montermini, Fabio. 2014b. «How is the meaning of complex lexemes constructed? A study of neoclassical compounds». In: *Italian Journal of Linguistics.* Vol. 26, N° 2, 157-182.

Martinet, André. 1979. *Grammaire fonctionnelle du français.* Paris: Didier.

-----. ³1980 [1961]. *Éléments de linguistique générale.* Nouv. éd. reman. e. m. à j. Paris: Armand Colin.

-----. 1985. *Syntaxe générale.* Paris: Colin.

-----. 1988. *Sintassi generale.* Prefazione di Tullio De Mauro. Roma/Bari: Laterza.

Michel, Sascha. 2009. «Das Konfix zwischen langue und parole. Ansätze zu einer sprachgebrauchsbezogenen Definition und Typologie». In: Müller, Peter O. (ed.): *Studien zur Fremdwortbildung.* Hildesheim: Olms, 91-140.

Migliorini, Bruno. 1963. «I prefissoidi (il tipo *aeromobile, radiodiffusione*)». In: Id.: *Saggi sulla lingua del Novecento.* Firenze: Sansoni, 9-60.

Müller, Peter Otto. 2015a. «Foreign word-formation in German». In: Müller, Peter O.; Ohnheiser, Ingeborg; Olsen, Susan; Rainer, Franz (edd.): *Word-Formation HSK 40.3: An International Handbook of the Languages of Europe.* Berlin, New York and Boston: de Gruyter, Vol. 3, 1615-1637.

-----. 2015b. *Studien zur Fremdwortbildung.* Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Olms.

Müller, Peter Otto; Ohnheiser, Ingeborg; Ohlsen, Susan; Rainer, Franz (edd.). 2015. *Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft. Vol. 40.3: Word formation 3: An International Handbook of the Languages of Europe.* Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter.

[ONLI] Adamo, Giovanni; Della Valle, Valeria. 2019. «Onli. Osservatorio neologico della lingua Italiana. Parole nuove dai giornali», http://www.iliesi.cnr.it/ONLI/crediti.shtml, last visited 12/02/2021).

Schmidt, Günter Dietrich. 1987. «Das Kombinem: Vorschläge zur Erweiterung des Begriffsfeldes und der Terminologie für den Bereich der Lehnwortbildung». In: Hoppe, Gabriele; Kirkness, Alan; Link, Elisabeth; Nortmeyer, Isolde; Rettig, Wolfgang; Schmidt, Günter Dietrich (edd.): *Deutsche Lehnwortbildung: Beiträge zur Erforschung der Wortbildung mit entlehnten WB-Einheiten im Deutschen*. Tübingen: Narr, 37-52.

Villoing, Florence. 2012. «French compounds». In: *Probus*. Vol. 24, N° 1, 29-60.