Annoying Morphology:
Pejoration and Pluralisation in German *Ge-e* and *-(er)ei* Nominalisations

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The German affixes *-(er)ei* and *Ge-e* are commonly analysed as conveying a speaker's negative attitude towards the events (or resulting entities) denoted by the nominals they derive (Harden 2003, Dammel & Quindt 2016). For example, while (1a), which contains a nominalised infinitive, indicates the speaker's doubts about the usefulness of their writing regardless of its quality, the use of *Schreiberei* or *Geschreibe* in (1b) adds the expressive meaning that the writing is itself pointless and aimless.

Although often treated as (near-)synonyms, *-(er)ei* and *Ge-e* are known to differ in a number of morphosyntactic and interpretive properties (including the types of bases to which they can attach), but have not, to date, received a formal analysis in the literature. The present paper aims to address this gap by providing a Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993, Marantz 1997) analysis of these two types of nominalisation, adopting Wood's (2023) Complex-Head hypothesis. I argue that *Ge-e* decomposes into a collectivising nominaliser *Ge-* and an evaluative functional head realised by *-e*, while the pejorative meaning of the nominalising head *-(er)ei* may instead arise through a conventionalised pragmatic inference (as proposed by Dammel & Quindt 2016 in light of the diachronic development of both affixes). The proposed analysis draws on the following central empirical observations:

(i) *Ge-e* nominalisations exist alongside a class of deverbal nominals derived by prefixation of *Ge-*, which, like *Ge-e*, developed from OHG *ga-*, used to form collectives. Both types of nominals can be ambiguous between event and result-state readings and have neuter gender, but only *Ge-e* is "reliably pejorative" (Dammel & Quindt 2016: 43, see further Šemelík & Kloudová 2023), cf. (2b).

(ii) While event nominalisations with *Ge-* and *-(er)ei* both allow pluralisation, including on their event readings (cf. (5)), *Ge-e* nominals cannot be pluralised (cf. the contrast in (3b)).

If, as data such as (3) suggest, pejorative *-e*, rather than collectivising *Ge-*, blocks pluralisation, this may be understood as a consequence of *-e* blocking Merge of Div in the nominal domain. The question then arises as to why an evaluative morpheme should have this effect. The answer may lie in what is usually taken to motivate the negative evaluation of the event denoted by the *Ge-e* nominal, namely its interpretation as (inconveniently) iterative or frequentative (Olsen 1991, among others). The hypothesis advocated here is that pejorative *-e* introduces a pluractional event structure whose parts are [atomic] events, extending the analysis of De Belder (2013), who argues that [atomic] blocks the projection of DivP in Dutch collective mass nouns. On the assumption that nominal individuation by Div requires an unpartitioned input (in this case, an undifferentiated quantity of event material), [atomic] *Ge-e* nominals, but not their non-[atomic] *Ge-* counterparts, will be unable to undergo pluralisation.

Under this analysis, *Ge-e* differs from *-(er)ei* in that only the former realises the feature [atomic] since only *Ge-e* contains the pejorative marker *-e* that encodes information about the mereological structure of the event denotation. By contrast, *-(er)ei* simply realises the nominalising head n, building on the proposal by Wood (2023: 17) that complex event nominals involve semantically expletive n, such that "[t]he overall noun has the same meaning that the corresponding verb would have had in a verb phrase". The present paper thus contributes to two existing lines of argument: first, Wood's (2023) claim that the nominalising head in complex event nominals is semantically vacuous; and second, the possibility of an interaction between evaluative morphology and nominal individuation, as independently evidenced by diminutives giving rise to singulative interpretations (see Ott 2011).

Data

(1) a. Ich habe keinen Glauben mehr an den Sinn meines Schreib-en-s.
I have no belief anymore at the purpose POSS.1SG.GEN.N.SG write-INF.NMLZ-GEN
'I no longer believe that my writing has a purpose.'

b. Ich habe keinen Glauben mehr an den Sinn meiner Schreib-erei /
I have no belief anymore at the purpose POSS.1SG.GEN.F.SG write-*EREI*
meines Ge-schreib-e-s.
POSS.1SG.GEN.N.SG *GE*-write-*E*-GEN
'I no longer believe that my scribbling has a purpose.' (cf. Klemperer 1996: 637)

(2) a. Der Löwe nutzt sein Ge-brüll zur Reviermarkierung.
the lion uses POSS.3SG.ACC.N.SG NMLZ-roar to.ART.F.DAT.SG marking-of-territory
'The lion uses his roar to mark his territory.'

b. #Der Löwe nutzt sein Ge-brüll-e zur Reviermarkierung.
the lion uses POSS.3SG.ACC.N.SG *GE*-roar-*E* to.ART.F.DAT.SG marking-of-territory

(3) a. Die Ge-brüll-e der Löwen im Reservat dauerten die ganze Nacht an.
the NMLZ-roar-PL of-the lions in.DEF.DAT.N.SG reserve lasted the whole night on
'The lions' roars in the reserve continued throughout the night.'

b. Ich hatte wegen dieses Vorfalls viele unangenehm-e, unnötig-e Schreib-erei-en
I had because-of this incident many unpleasant-PL, unnecessary-PL write-*EREI*-PL
/ *Ge-schreib-e / *Ge-schreib-e-n.
/ *GE*-write-*E*.PL / *GE*-write-*E*-PL
'Because of this incident, I had to do a lot of unpleasant, unnecessary writing.'
(cf. https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Schreiberei)

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