Affixmaxxing or the emergence of new derivational affixes in online discourse: A construction morphology approach

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Abstract

In this article I trace the development of what I claim to be new derivational affixes found in the language of a selected online community. The elements analysed originate from the so-called *manosphere* in general, and the discourse of *incels* in particular. These online-based communities can be characterized by, among many features, the cryptic jargon that they habitually employ in their discourse. In this paper I pay particular attention to three affixes used originally exclusively in the manosphere (*-maxx*, *-mog*, *-cel*). Their development can be described using the theoretical apparatus proposed by Mattiello (2017; 2022). I also claim that their emergence can be best accounted for in the methodological framework of construction morphology (Booij, 2010; Hüning and Booij, 2014). This approach is a better fit in the case of the emergence of new derivational affixes compared to the grammaticalization methodology that has been traditionally used for tracing the emergence of inflectional affixes. Nonetheless, these two approaches (grammaticalization and constructionalization) are not incompatible and can be used as complementary tools to provide a more fit-for-purpose method for studying various kinds of language change.

Key words

constructionalization. grammaticalization, affixes, productivity, word formation, manosphere, incels

1. Introduction

In this article I investigate three cases of constructionalization, i.e. a process which leads to the development of a new schema which, in turn, forms a basis for the creation of new words. The schema is created when multiple elements are added to the lexicon via analogy to the prototypical element that serves as a model for new extensions. The emergence of affixes out of lexemes (or blend splinters, clipped words, or acronyms in the case in the three affixes analysed) is traditionally described using the grammaticalization research methodology. The argument that I propose in this article, however, is in line with construction morphology and states that the emergence of derivational affixes can be better accounted for as a case of constructionalization. The changes described in this article occur in the language of online communities collectively referred to as the manosphere, and the discourse of the so-called incels in particular. I specifically investigate three newly emerged affixes *-maxx*, *-mog*, and *-cel*. In the first part of the article, I briefly describe and compare grammaticalization with constructionalization in order to show the methodological advantage of the latter in reference to word-formation processes (Hüning and Booij, 2014). Also, I stress the role of analogy in word formation (Mattiello, 2016; 2017). In the following parts I provide a background on the manosphere and briefly characterize its discourse. In the analytical part I provide a qualitative description of novel formations which are built upon the three constructional schemas: X-*maxx*, X-*mog*, and X-*cel*.

2. Constructionalization vis-à-vis grammaticalization

The movement of a linguistic element along what is considered a "cline of grammaticalization" (Fischer, Norde, and Perridon, 2004), i.e. from a more lexical to a more grammatical end of the spectrum, is generally referred to as grammaticalization and is mainly studied diachronically. Thus,

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grammaticalization research methods are applied to a very broad spectrum of language change phenomena. They are considered an almost default methodology in language change, and indeed, grammaticalization seems to be very well suited to accounting for some cases of language change, but not necessarily perfect for all – as I am going to argue in the following parts of this paper.

Grammaticalization is understood as

> the development from lexical to grammatical forms and from grammatical to even more grammatical forms. And since the development of grammatical forms is not independent from the constructions to which they belong, the study of grammaticalization is also concerned with constructions and with even larger discourse segments. (Heine and Kuteva, 2002, p.2; cited in Heine, Narrog, and Long, 2016, pp.148–49)

This definition stresses the role of constructions in the process of grammatical change. This assumption is central to this paper and will be elaborated on as the article unravels. Grammaticalization is a process that implies a series of steps. Also, the process does not occur abruptly, but is typically slow and gradual (hence a cline):

> Basic to work on grammaticalization is the concept of a "cline". […] From the point of view of change, forms do not shift abruptly, from one category to another, but go through a series of gradual transitions, transitions that tend to be similar in type across languages. (Hopper and Traugott 2003, p.6)

Depending on the stage of the process, different degrees of co-occurrence can be observed. This phenomenon leads to the occurrence of synonymous items and constructions with seemingly competing functions (Bybee 2010, p.110). It also explains why some of the structures can be used interchangeably, whereas others fall out of use and become obsolete and inadequate in a given context. It also helps trace the origin of currently existing ones as well as those that are only beginning to gain ground.

Grammaticalization has been scrupulously studied and extensively written on from two distinct, yet mutually complementary, perspectives. One deals with the process of change, whereas the other describes its results and consequences. The synchronic approach implies the study of language as a static and stable structure. The diachronic view presents a set of changes taking place in the evolution of a language, its different stages and the changeability of its nature. Thus, grammaticalization can be studied from two perspectives: the "static" one, which presents the current state of affairs, the current stages of the evolution of language, i.e. how we use the existing language taking into consideration pragmatics and discourse rules, and the "dynamic", historical one, which traces back the origin of structures and expressions highlighting the processes of change. Hopper and Traugott describe these perspectives in the following way:

> The chief perspective is historical, investigating the sources of grammatical forms and the typical steps of change they undergo. From this perspective, grammaticalization is usually thought of as that subset of linguistic changes whereby a lexical item or construction in certain uses takes on grammatical characteristics, or through which a grammatical item becomes more grammatical. The other perspective is more synchronic, seeing grammaticalisation as primarily a syntactic, discourse pragmatic phenomenon, to be studies from the point of view of fluid patterns of language use. (Hopper and Traugott 2003, p.2)

This view is also in line with Brinton and Traugott's:

> From a synchronic perspective, grammaticalization is primarily a morphosyntactic, discourse pragmatic phenomenon, to be studied from the point of view of fluid, dynamic patterns of language use at a moment in time. It is a way of organizing patterns of language that differ in minimal and local ways. (Brinton and Traugott 2005, p.22)

In this paper I investigate changes taking place over a relatively short time span and only locally (i.e. in the language used by a specific community). Macaulay observes that "grammaticalization is a process that is normally investigated on the basis of historical documents but recent developments in methodology provide an opportunity to explore changes in progress" (2006, p.1). Thus, I accept this time-restricted and scope-limited approach as methodologically valid. Nonetheless, adopting the grammaticalization research methodology inevitable shifts focus onto the process itself, rather than

the end-product. This is also visible in one of the key tenets of grammaticalization theory, i.e. the unidirectionality hypothesis. According to the unidirectionality hypothesis proposed by Hopper and Traugott (2003), languages undergo a certain series of changes and follow a fixed path. There are several stages in the development of a linguistic item (from a content word to a grammatical word to a clitic to an inflectional affix). Content words, also called lexical words, belong to an open class of linguistic items. This group accepts the addition of new elements due to various processes connected to word formation and also phenomena such as borrowings, compounds and the like. The most typical representatives of the open class are the elements belonging to various grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Open-class words are liable to change, which means they can be modified, replaced by other words or can disappear completely. This fact makes the group fluid and open-ended. On the other hand, there is also a closed class which consists of adpositions, determiners, pronouns and conjunctions. This is what Hopper and Traugott refer to as grammatical words. This class is considerably smaller and significantly slower to change. Theoretically, some items may be added to the group over time, but the already existing ones hardly change or fall out of use. Possible expansion is also very unlikely, and if it does occur, it occurs over a significantly longer timespan (compared to, for instance, the timespan of the acceptance of a new borrowing or blend). It makes this class a fossilized collection of elements constituting the core of a language. Open and closed classes do not necessarily coincide across languages. Content words are semantically transparent. Grammatical words, or function words are the ones that carry little or no semantic meaning while contributing to the grammatical relations within a sentence. They glue together content words helping to create comprehensible and meaningful sentences. Function words cannot be isolated from other words, and they are also less independent when the distributional properties are taken into consideration. Affixes are fairly dependent too. They attach to other items and once attached cannot exist independently. In the majority of cases, they do not take stress. They also adjust phonologically to their hosts (e.g. different pronunciation of the past tense ending *-ed* or the plural morpheme *-s* depending on the preceding sound, i.e. the final sound of a verb or noun stem). Moreover, affixes are highly selective, which means they cannot attach to any item. Their distribution within sentence boundaries is limited too. All those features make affixes similar to clitics, but what distinguishes them is that:

> Affixes change the semantic content and/or the syntactic function of a word. Clitics, on the other hand, do not affect word meaning or word function, but generally have to do with text structure or speaker attitude. (Taylor 2003, p.207)

Clitics constitute a highly heterogenous category, as this term is often used to refer to any intermediate stage between lexical items and affixes (Klavans, 2020). Not all of the stages in the cline of grammatical development are obligatory, though. To illustrate this fact, let us consider the example of the English adjectival ending *-ful*. Its origin can be easily traced back to the word *full* as in *beautiful* (meaning full of beauty). The semantic nature of the content word has been lost to a great extent. Instead of serving a semantic function, *-ful* is used now as a marker of a grammatical category, i.e. an affix. The function word as well as the clitic stage have been skipped. Summing up, what is important is the general direction along the grammaticalization cline in which elements are shifted, not the fulfilment of every single stage in it.

However, the shift from a purely lexical free item to a more functional and bound one and the possible ensuing creation of a new constructional schema can be referred to as constructionalization instead. Whereas all the general principles found in the grammaticalization theory apply successfully to constructionalization, there are several differences that need underscoring. First, although constructionalization, like grammaticalization, is studied diachronically – as it involves a collection of changes to the distribution and behaviour of an item – it can account for more abrupt processes which take place in shorter timespans and more restricted environments (e.g. in jargons of selected communities only). Such cases can be better explained by "contentful constructionalization" in which, Traugott and Trousdale state, "only minimal local, rather than extensive syntactic, expansion is typically involved". And "once a contentful schema has come into being the new expressions it sanctions are coined instantaneously rather than gradually" (2014, p.256). An example of such a change is found in their discussion of the affix *-hood*. The affix *-hood* originated as a free morpheme and then steadily developed into a compound element, an affixoid and finally an affix. A constructional schema develops

and leads to the creation of even more novel expressions in the process of word formation by analogy. Analogy is defined as "the word-formation process whereby a new word is coined that is either based on a precise actual model word, or obtained after a set of concrete prototype words which share the same formation (i.e., series) or some of their bases/stems (i.e., word family)" (Mattiello, 2017, p.12). Mattiello refers to the first type as "surface analogy" and the second one as "analogy by schema". Surface analogy may lead to analogy by schema once the original formation starts functioning as a basis for other items and creates a series of analogous formations or word families. Analogy by schema, in turn, may evolve into a regular pattern and eventually even a rule. "However, unlike rules, schemas are identifiable with concrete sets of words called 'analogical sets'" (Mattiello, 2017, p.13). The existence of analogical words leads to a creation of a schema with the prototypical words serving as a model for the creation of new additions. The process is gradual and therefore:

> the line of demarcation between the type called surface analogy and that called analogy via schema is at times difficult to establish, at least, diachronically speaking. Synchronically, as a minimum, two target words obeying the same pattern should be attested to develop a schema. (Mattiello, 2017, pp.44–45)

In the analytical part of the present paper, I investigate three such analogical sets that originally developed via surface analogy – in the cases with clearly identifiable prototype that served as a model for further word formation – and/or analogy by schema – where it is not possible to identify with certainty the original prototypical item, but rather a series of items bound together by the same formation pattern (specifically, derivation with an affix). Since in each of these cases there are significantly more than two words "obeying the same pattern", it can be claimed that there is a constructional schema in place in each of these sets. If so, these word-formation processes can be considered products of constructionalization.

Hüning and Booij (2014) propose the concept of constructionalization to better account for the emergence of new derivational affixes from compound elements. As mentioned above, constructionalization seems to effectively bypass some of the limitations inherent to grammaticalization and lexicalization-focused views. At the same time, constructionalization does not contradict any of the principles established in the grammaticalization and lexicalization research. Rather, it shifts attention from areas of study which are not immediately relevant to the compounding-to-derivation transition, focusing on other aspects of the process instead. This is especially pertinent to the discussion about the emergence of derivational (as opposed to inflectional) affixes, as their status seems to be less clear and thus stirs more controversy. The lexical origin of elements transitioning from compounding to derivation often remains transparent and they do not undergo semantic bleaching (or are semantically bleached only to a limited extent). Also, they do not necessarily undergo any phonetic reduction and lose some, but not all, syntactic autonomy. They commonly coexist alongside their original lexemes and thus can be classified, in certain cases at least, as affixoids (Stevens, 2005) rather than affixes, but still remain somewhat ambiguous. Unlike inflectional affixes, which are used for the creation of different grammatical forms, derivational affixes are used in word formation. On the other hand, the path of their emergence corresponds to the movement of elements alongside the grammaticalization cline (from the more lexical to the more grammatical end of the scale), however, the stages on this cline are rather different (see Stevens, 2005 cited in: Hüning and Booij, 2014, p.5). Both grammaticalization and lexicalization, however, blur the most relevant aspects of the creation of derivational affixes and add terminological and methodological confusion to this area of research (for the discussion about the inconsistent status of derivational affixes in the literature see Hüning and Booij, 2014). In short, the emergence of derivational affixes cannot be explained as a result of lexicalization, as lexicalization leads to the creation of autonomous elements, whereas derivational affixes are bound morphemes. They do, however, function as building blocks for new autonomous words. It cannot be explained as a result of grammaticalization in a strict sense either, as grammaticalization leads to the creation of functional elements, whereas derivational affixes still possess semantic meaning. Grammaticalization is commonly defined as a movement towards the more grammatical end of the spectrum, and thus the development of derivational affixes seems to be in line with this process. Thus, whereas neither lexicalization, nor grammaticalization is particularly fitting in describing the development of derivational affixes, they both provide a general framework on which the investigation of this process can be based. Since derivational affixes may be the result of both grammaticalization and lexicalization, either grammaticalization or

lexicalization, or neither one nor the other, it becomes clear that a different approach is required to properly account for their emergence in language. Construction morphology (and specifically the concept of constructionalization) comes to the rescue. It is perfectly compatible with grammaticalization research and shares a lot of its methodological grounding with it, however, as Hüning and Booij (2014) notice, it seems advisable to avoid the term grammaticalization in respect to word formation and use constructionalization instead. In construction morphology, words are considered constructions, i.e. pairings of form and meaning (Booij, 2010). Word-formation patterns are abstract schemas that serve as scaffoldings on which new elements are based. These constructional schemas (also: Langacker, 2008, pp.167–70) arise as a result of abstracting away from numbers of similar patterns (e.g. stem-affix pairings) and then sanction the emergence of novel elements (or also new subschemas with more specific properties). A constructional schema is schematic in that it allows its slot(s) to be filled with more concrete elements that fulfil the criteria sanctioned by this schema (e.g. the requirement of a slot being filled by a member of a particular word class or semantic category). Constructionalization, thus, is the creation of a new schema abstracted away from previous usages of a certain morphosyntactic construct which sanctions the production of novel instances via analogical reasoning. Constructions analysed in the present paper consist of stems and newly emerged affixes. Once the frequency of use increases, the affix starts to attach to hosts belonging to certain semantic clusters (creating words series or word families) and gradually expands beyond them and gains new semantic territories and new contexts (for a similar discussion on the prefix *post-* see Prażmo, 2020a). Mattiello explains the motivation behind the creation of new formations and provides a general classification of domains in which such new words are most likely to be found:

> Speakers may choose to create new analogical formations on account of their attractiveness, humorousness, or because they allude to their models and are therefore easier to be memorised. Examples of new analogical formations appertain to diverse domains. They include: a) specialised terms designed to name new discoveries, alliances, and illnesses; b) adolescents' creative vocabulary items coined as cryptic in-group slang; c) journalistic occasionalisms meant to play on words and jocularly attract the readers' attention; and d) audacious neologisms or nonce words invented by poets and novelists for stylistic reasons. (Mattiello, 2017, p.24)

New words analysed in this paper can be subsumed under group b) in her classification, as they form part of "cryptic in-group slang" used by a group of mostly young men who identify as incels.

Another issue deserving an explanation here is whether the three elements analysed below are indeed affixes. It is worth mentioning that there exists some terminological confusion, and the boundaries between different morphological categories seem to be blurry due to the transitional nature of categories (Mattiello, 2022). Adams observes that it is apparent "that the distinction between affixes, compound elements and splinters is not always clear-cut, and that we cannot easily disentangle blending from other processes of word formation and treat it on its own" (1973, p.188). For instance, *-cel* is a blend splinter[1] (from *incel* – involuntary celibate) transitioning towards "independent morphemehood":

> When a splinter becomes so common that people start using it frequently, it may lose its connection with the source word and can be considered as a morpheme in its own right. Of course, since there is a scale from a completely novel splinter to a completely conventional morpheme, the transition from splinter to independent morphemehood is a diachronic process. However, some clear candidates for morpheme status are gate < Watergate, (a)holic < alcoholic), and thon < marathon. These elements always appear in final position. (Lehrer, 2007, p.121)

Thus, some splinters become morphemes, whereas others "have not yet acquired independent morphemehood, but their formation of series of blends is symptomatic of their productivity and definitely deserves in-depth investigation" (Mattiello, 2022, p.18). Since *-cel* is highly productive and definitely on its way to "affixhood", it will be referred to in this paper as an affix.

-Mog, in turn, can be considered an acronym splinter (from *amog* – alpha male of the group) which was clipped and then reanalysed as a verb (*to mog* someone). When attached to stems its meaning

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[1] The Wiktionary online lists a noun *cel* which is considered to be a clipping of *celibate*. This free form, however, has not been recorded in the corpus analysed (cf. https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/cel accessed 7/04/2023).

becomes very schematic and is substantiated only by the semantic value provided by the stem. Similarly to the suffix *-ful*, which functions alongside its lexical "parent" *full*, *-mog* coexists with AMOG and *to mog*. And just like *-ful* only becomes semantically specified in words such as *beautiful* or *awful*, so does *-mog* in e.g. *heightmog* or *jawmog*. Due to its schematicity and high productivity I thus consider it to be an affix.

-Maxx is a stylized version of a full word *to max* and thus perhaps could be considered an affixoid, as "affixoids exist alongside formally identical, and usually free, 'parent' morphs, yet they acquire a more generalised meaning" (Stevens, 2005, p.73 in Mattiello, 2022, p.11). Affixoids differ from their "parent" morphs in that they acquire more abstract meaning and are used productively. Some morphologists, however, argue that the distinction between an affix and an affixoid in unhelpful (Bauer, Lieber, and Plag, 2013, pp.440–441). Should *-maxx* be thus considered an affix or a compound element?

> The most important criterion in distinguishing a compound element from a suffix seems, therefore, its relatedness to a free form. If the constituent in question occurs with the same meaning as a free form, no additional affix should be assumed. If, however, the bound form consistently differs in meaning from the free form, one should assume the existence of an affix. (Bauer, Lieber, and Plag, 2013, p.441)

Clearly, the meaning of *-maxx* as it is used in the manosphere differs from the general meaning of the verb *to maximize*. It originates as a content word (*to maximize*), undergoes clipping (*to max)* and spelling modification (*to maxx*) – presumably to differentiate it from the original word so that it is immediately recognizable as a separate semantic cluster – and finally becomes a derivational affix (*-maxx*) which then admits inflectional suffixes such as *-ing* in *-maxxing* and *-ed* in *-maxxed*. So even if the stylistic innovation of a doubled letter is ignored, *-maxx* differs from its "parent" *to max* in several ways, and thus, for the purposes of the present paper, I refer to it as an affix (bearing in mind the abovementioned terminological issues).

3. Materials and methods

This paper is meant to provide a methodological scaffolding for accounting for the abrupt and rapid development of new derivational affixes in online discourse. Instead of applying the wide-angle lens of traditional grammaticalization research and investigating language change as it diachronically unfolds, I place my focus on language used by a relatively small online community and take a synchronic look at their contemporary discourse. What this perspective reveals is a small-scale collection of elements evolving and changing at high speed, some of which can be considered undergoing accelerated grammaticalization, which, in fact, can be more precisely described in terms of constructionalization. Constructionalization seems to be very well suited to describing word-formation processes. The emergence of new derivational affixes and their increasing productivity results in numerous instances of nonce formations and neologisms coined by analogy to previously established items based on a constructional schema. Thus, this paper is maintained within the methodological framework of construction morphology with special focus on the concept of constructionalization.

This theoretical elaboration is illustrated with the analysis of selected examples, but is not meant as quantitative, but rather qualitative and descriptive. Thus, no attempt is made to gauge the frequencies of occurrence of newly emerging items or their distribution in corpora. Rare instances (including hapax legomena) are enumerated and given as much attention as more frequent and more conventionalized formations. The self-compiled lists of new words created in the process of derivation (i.e. in the process of adding new affixes to different stems) are not meant to be exhaustive, but illustrative. The scope of data collection is limited to one specific website only, even though I am aware of the fact that more items with the affixes in question are constantly being coined outside of the selected website. The examples have been extracted from Incels Wiki (available at: https://incels.wiki/w/Main_Page) established in 2018 as a collection of knowledge about the incel community. Incel Wiki has already been recognized as a valuable source of data related to the manosphere in general and incelosphere in particular.

> I argue that the incel psyche can best be understood through a reading of the incel wiki, which was established after a large incel community on Reddit was banned. During the ban, all of the content was lost, and in an attempt to regain their power a group of users created a wiki as a collaborative knowledge

repository and archive. I argue that this archive not only serves as a way of reclaiming power via the process of embracing the incels' symbolic castration but reveals the social epistemology of the group, as well as their shared fantasies, by creating an imaginary order. As a collaborative knowledge space and archive, the wiki allows for the sublimation of incel desire. (DeCook, 2021, abstract)

In the following part I provide a brief introduction to the background of the incel community and subsequently proceed to analysing concrete instances of constructionalization observed in the incel discourse.

4. Incelosphere

The term *incel* (i.e. *involuntary celibate*) refers to a group of individuals who claim to be unable to find romantic or sexual partners. It is an online-based community of males mostly self-identifying as heterosexual. The majority are Caucasian, although many of them are *ethnicels* (i.e. *incels* of various ethnic backgrounds). They gather on online forums and try to explain their romantic failures by using pseudo-scientific methods. They believe that their misery "is the combined result of genetic factors, evolutionarily determined traits in women, and inequitable social structures" (Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology 2020: 3). They claim that most women favour good looks above all other qualities, and thus *incels'* alleged ugliness and lack of social skills leaves them *involuntarily celibate*. According to a document published by the European Commission[2] whose aims include an attempt to "demystify key tenets of the incel ideology and its relationship to violence", the *incel* movement forms part of a broader *manosphere* phenomenon. *Manosphere* consists of four main sub-movements: *Pickup Artists* (PUAs), *Men Going Their Own Way* (MGTOW), *Men's Rights Activists* (MRAs), and *incels* (cf. Ribeiro et al., 2020). All of these groups exhibit varying degrees of misogyny, anti-feminism, and sexism. Many members of the *manosphere* also tend to lean towards white supremacism and alt-right ideology. MRA originated as a movement against the perceived inequality of treatment of men in the context of legal issues such as child custody, divorce agreements, child support allocation, and military duties. It has gradually moved online and started to radicalize, producing numerous offshoots in the process. It partially morphed into MGTOW, but while MRA is concerned with changing the existing legal status quo, which is claimed to be discriminatory towards men, MGTOW members do not attempt to change laws, but rather "go their own way", i.e. abandon the traditional models of relationships with women (e.g. marriage and cohabitation). MGOTW "are a group of men who vow to stop pursuing romantic relationships with women to focus on self-development and preservation" (Jones, Trott, and Wright, 2020, p.2). They focus on more egocentric, self-improving actions and thus are considered less dangerous than other strands of the manosphere. PUAs, in turn, are similar to *incels* in that their primary area of interest revolves around sexual relations with women. PUAs, however, treat relations like a game and believe that women can be tricked or manipulated into having sex with men. PUAs specialize in providing techniques, strategies, and tips for winning women. Some aspects of this "game" are highly controversial, and the way they are presented can be perceived as insulting to women.

> The PUA and seduction community emerged as a way to "teach" confidence, to instill mastery in men who had been denied this skill mainly by the visibility of popular feminism, where women are exhorted to be confident, sexual subjects. Here, sexual confidence is seen as a resource, one in short supply. The more women have it, the less men do. Once sexual confidence is defined as a scarce resource, women are considered threats to the supply and are thus themselves turned into resources.

> Thus, women must be controlled and made less confident in order for men to become confident. With PUAs, this includes undermining a woman's self-confidence (e.g., negging, or insinuating negative comments to get her to seek approval). (Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019, pp.5011–5012)

All in all, PUAs differ from incels significantly, because they do not blame any external sources for their failure to win the dating game. Neither do they exhibit a sense of entitlement similar to that of incels who claim that they are unlawfully denied what should be their right – i.e. sexual relationships.

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[2] https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/whats-new/publications/incels-first-scan-phenomenon-eu-and-its-relevance-and-challenges-pcve_en (accessed 28/12/2021)

Incels are "united by a strong feeling of rejection and rage towards the opposite sex" (Ribeiro et al., 2020, p.2) and by far the most fatalistic of all *manosphere* strands' representatives. In fact, most incels aspire to be PUAs and heed their advice but nonetheless remain unsuccessful in their romantic pursuits. The most active pockets of incel activity can be found of various subreddits on Reddit, as well as on Twitter, YouTube, 4chan, and 8kun (Papadamou et al., 2021). Incels produce a specific jargon, often impenetrable to outsiders, with special terminology and conventions (Ging, 2019; Heritage and Koller, 2020), heavily reliant on metaphors (Prażmo, 2020b, 2024; Waśniewska, 2020), acronyms, and various neologisms. However, a thorough analysis of the incels' discourse is beyond the scope of the present paper. Instead, here I concentrate on several aspects of their jargon in order to illustrate the emergence of new derivational affixes through constructionalization. Specifically, I investigate three elements: *-maxx*, *-mog*, and *-cel*.

5. Constructionalisation: case studies

In this section I briefly describe the three newly-emerged derivational affixes found in the discourse of incels.

5.1 *-maxx*

The prefix *-maxx* in most frequently used in gerund forms of verbs. Verbal inflectional suffix *-ing* attaches to derivational suffix *-maxx* forming the gerund *-maxxing*. In the incels' jargon, *looksmaxxing* served as a prototype on which new words started to be created by means of surface analogy. They gradually formed series and further increased their productivity due to analogy by schema. The constructional schema X-*maxxing* has started to encompass more and more stems from various semantic clusters.

The prototypical element in the *-maxx* category, i.e. *looksmaxxing*, is defined as any attempt to improve one's appearance (in order to attract more – or any – potential sexual partners). -Maxxing is defined on the Incel Wiki as "an effort to improve an aspect of one's life to secure sexual and/or romantic intimacy. 'Maximize' it. Used to denote self-improvement in general" (Incel Term Glossary 2021). There are mild forms of *looksmaxxing*, the so called *softmaxxing*, such as making dietary changes, working out at the gym, or improving one's grooming and style. Other forms are more invasive and are referred to as *hard looksmaxxing* (interestingly no equivalent to *softmaxxing*, i.e. *hardmaxxing* exists. Instead, incels prefer the more descriptive *hard looksmaxxing*, probably in order to retain more semantic transparency, even though *softmaxxing* is equally opaque. *Hardmaxxing* is accounted for outside of the Incels Wiki, though, esp. on Reddit). *Hard looksmaxxing* methods include, among others, plastic surgeries, taking anabolic steroids or bleaching one's skin in order to look more attractive. There is a notable proliferation in the X-*maxxing* construction reflected in the creation of more specialized terms for *softmaxxing* or *hard looksmaxxing*. These specialized terms include: *dickmaxxing/jelqmaxxing*, *gymmaxxing*, *lowinhibmaxxing*, *moneymaxxing*, *NTmaxxing*, *statusmaxxing*, *surgerymaxxing*, *trannymaxing*, *whitemaxxing*. The examples, as mentioned above, serve only illustrative purposes and thus will not be described in undue detail, especially considering the fact that some readers may find some of them disturbing.

The meaning is analysable (both the *-maxx/-maxxing* elements as well as the stem are in the majority of cases morphologically transparent) and in most instances also highly compositional (for the discussion on analysability and compositionality see Bybee, 2010, p.45). For instance, it should come as no surprise that *moneymaxxing* (as well as the related *wealthmaxxing*) refers to improving one's desirability as a potential partner by improving financial status, whereas *statusmaxxing* is about improving desirability and attractiveness by moving upwards in the social hierarchy in general. There are, however, instances where despite high analysability, compositionality is relatively low. For instance, *lowinhibmaxxing* is actually related to minimizing (rather than maximizing) one's social inhibitions in order to come across as more self-confident in social situations and hence more attractive. *NTmaxxing*, probably the least analysable and compositional of all the documented cases, includes the NT element which stands for "neurotypical". Neurotypical traits are hailed as highly desirable by incels who often self-report having severe social anxiety and extreme shyness, which renders them ineffective in forging new relations. *NTmaxxing* is thus "maximizing non-autistic traits to appear and act normal and have

better success with women, regardless of whether one has autism or not. Acting 'cool' or 'normal'" (Incel Term Glossary 2021).

Other elements created on the basis of X-*maxxing* schema include: *careermaxxing/academiamaxxing* – trying to improve one's career and/or education in order to better social status; *clownmaxxing/honkmaxxing* – improving the skill of seeing the world and your own life as joke as a coping mechanism; *jestermaxxing* – trying to improve one's ability to make other people laugh; *therapymaxxing* – improving one's mental condition by going to therapy (in order to consequently improve one's social and dating skills); *medmaxxing* – resorting to medication (esp. in the case of *medcels* and *mentalcels*) in order to improve one's personality and skills; *SEAmaxxing* (*South-East-Asia-maxxing)* – "the practice of improving ones dating-chances as a Westerner by dating in South East Asia" (-Maxxing 2021); *trannymaxxing* – an attempt to change to another gender in order to improve one's dating chances; *machismomaxxing* (aka *narcisismmaxxing* or *Chadmaxxing*) – trying to become more "macho" in order to be more attractive; *castratemaxxing* (also referred to as *emasculatemaxxing*) – refers to the practice of removing one's genitals in order to cope with inceldom; *goatmaxxing* involves moving out to a desert or a mountainous area to graze goats and live a simple life; whereas *thugmaxxing* is imitating the life of a stereotypical black gangster in order to gain popularity among women. The suffix -*maxx* (here in formations with inflectional suffix -*ing*) attaches to hosts of various categories: nouns (*looksmaxxing*), adjectives (*softmaxxing*), acronyms (*SEAmaxxing*), and complex expressions (*lowinhibmaxxing*).

Instances of elements based on the X-*maxx* constructional schema attested on the Incels Wiki include the 28 following words: *academiamaxxing*, *careermaxxing*, *castratemaxxing*, *Chadmaxxing*, *clownmaxxing*, *dickmaxxing*, *emasculatemaxxing*, *goatmaxxing*, *gymmaxxing*, *honkmaxxing*, *jelqmaxxing*, *jestermaxxing*, *looksmaxxing*, *lowinhibmaxxing*, *machismomaxxing*, *medmaxxing*, *moneymaxxing*, *narcisismmaxxing*, *NTmaxxing*, *SEAmaxxing*, *softmaxxing*, *statusmaxxing*, *surgerymaxxing*, *therapymaxxing*, *thugmaxxing*, *trannymaxing*, *wealthmaxxing*, *whitemaxxing*.

5.2 -*mog*

Even though -*mog* may be associated with the lexeme *mog*, a synonym of *moggy* i.e., "a domestic cat, especially a non-pedigree or unremarkable one" (Mog 2021), it actually derives from the acronym AMOG (alpha male of the group), and its verbal meaning is related to asserting one's dominance over another. According to Incel Wiki, -*mogged* is:

> [A] Suffix indicating being dominated by another person. The stem word denotes the feature that one is being dominated by. Derives from the PUA term AMOG, or "alpha male of the group". Deliberately trying to humiliate or otherwise dominate others was advocated as a form of increasing your perceived social value to women by pick-up artists, this usage later morphed to refer to any feature that supposedly contributes to perceptions of social dominance in general, many of these features are proposed in a facetious manner. (Incel Term Glossary 2021)

There is a high degree of analysability, but at the same time relatively low compositionality, as the -*mog* element only refers to a specialized acronym only known to those familiar with the basic manosphere terminology. This suffix, just like the suffix -*maxx* described above, appears most frequently in gerund verb forms. One can be *mogged* (i.e. intimidated, threatened or shamed) in a variety of ways, which include: *agemogging*, *akabusimogging*, *breastmogging*, *buttmogging*, *dickmogging*, *DOLPHmogging*, *hairmogging*, *heightmogging*, *IQmogging*, *jawmogging*, *skinmogging*, *skullmogging*, *torsomogging*, *voicemogging*.

Types of mogging can be divided into several categories. There is no single clearly recognizable prototypical element, although *heightmogging* seems to be the most likely candidate. The predominant and most numerous group of elements is thus the category related to body parts and bodily composition (e.g. *breastmogging*, *jawmogging*, *heightmogging*). For instance, *jawmogging* is defined as "a form of mogging where the male with the masculine alpha jaw bone undermines a man with a roundish jaw" (Jawmogging 2021), whereas *heightmogging* is "an instance wherein a tall person undermines another person purely by standing next to them. During an act of *heightmogging*, the *heightmogger* feels proud, whereas the *heightmoggee* feels humiliated" (Heightmog 2021). This category extends into voice, age, and intellect (*agemogging*, *voicemogging*, *IQmogging*) and even further into a category in which one is

mogged by an individual possessing highly desirable traits modelled on those possessed by famous people selected by incels as truly representative alpha males (*akabusimogging* which refers to being intimidated by individuals with Kriss Akabusi-like prowess, or *DOLPHmogging*, which is considered the hardest form of *mogging* and refers to being dominated by Dolph Lundgren).

The suffix attaches to different categories of stems: nouns (*jawmogging*), acronyms (*IQmogging*), and proper names (*DOLPHmogging*). Unlike the -*maxx* suffix it has not been reported on the Incels Wiki to attach to adjectives (yet). Neither -*maxx*, nor -*mog* attaches to other verbs at present. This suffix (as well as its variants in combination with inflectional suffixes: -*mogging* and -*mogged*, -*mogger*, and -*moggee*) illustrates the following path of change: complex expression (alpha male of the group) > acronym (AMOG) > modified acronym (MOG) > derivational affix (-*mog*).

Fifteen elements based on the X-mogging constructional schema are attested on the Incels Wiki: agemogging, akabusimogging, breastmogging, buttmogging, dickmogging, DOLPHmogging, hairmogging, heightmogging, IQmogging, jawmogging, NT-mogging, skinmogging, skullmogging, torsomogging, voicemogging.

5.3 -*cel*

The suffix -*cel* is a splinter, i.e. a part of the lexical blend (Kemmer, 2003) *incel* which, as stated above, stands for *involuntary celibate*. It is defined on the Incels Wiki as follows: "is sometimes used as a suffix used in the incelosphere to denote a type of deficiency an involuntary celibate has that contributes to their inceldom" (-Cel 2021). There are, however, some inconsistencies and apparent lack of logic in its etymology, which the Incels Wiki explains in the following way:

> This has questionable grammar logic since this practice involves dropping the "in-" prefix (short for involuntarily) which makes it seem like the term applies to all celibates and not just incelibates. Why this may make sense however is that by ascribing some cause other than "voluntary" to a celibacy, you are de-facto implying it is involuntary by saying so. A "locationcel" for example, doesn't need to be called "locationINcel" because there would be no such thing as a "locationVOLcel" since if your celibacy is voluntary, you being in a location where it is hard to find sex partners would be irrelevant. (-Cel 2021)

The blend *incel* itself is relatively low on both analysability and compositionality, but the suffix -*cel* is even more difficult to recognize as far as its formal constitution and semantic contribution is concerned, esp. in formations other than the original *incel*. The suffix thus forms a schema in which the host slot is empty and can be filled with various grammatical elements, mostly nouns and adjectives (e.g. *eyecel*, *truecel*), but also acronyms (e.g., *NEETcel*, *STEMcel*) and other affixes (e.g., *noncel*, *semicel*). Novel creations based on this schema abound, thus the suffix -*cel* can be said to be very productive and (somewhat paradoxically) even very "promiscuous", as it attaches to many parts of speech almost indiscriminately.

There are different types of incels depending on their race and origin. Those of non-Caucasian descent are referred to as *ethnicels* and given various ethnonyms (many of them stereotype-motivated), such as: *arabcel*, *beancel*, *blackcel*, *currycel*, *francel*, *hapacel*, *italiancel*, *persocel*, *redcel*, *ricecel*, *turkcel*, *whitecel*. Thus, for instance a *ricecel* is defined as "an individual whose involuntary celibacy can be attributed to their East or Southeast Asian ancestry" (Ricecel 2021), whereas a *beancel* (or a *tacocel*) is "a subset of *ethnicel* meaning someone whose inceldom is caused by sexual discrimination targeted against their Hispanic/Latino roots" (Beancel 2021). Incels also vary according to their religion which is referenced in, for instance, *christocels* or *muslimcels*. They suffer from various diseases and afflictions and are referred to accordingly, for instance by terms like: *mentalcel*, *autistcel*, *spergcel*, *disabledcel*, *emcel*, *manchildcel*, *medcel*, *stuttercel*. Their state of involuntary celibacy can be ascribed to problems with looks and appearance, as represented by the following terms: *acnecel*, *baldcel*, *chincel*, *cutecel*, *dickcel*, *eyecel*, *fatcel*, *framecel*, *haircel*, *heightcel*, *nosecel*, *ramuscel*, *thincel*, *uglycel*, *wristcel*, *earcel*. Even though most incels are heterosexual males, there exists a terminology for various sexual practices and preferences among them, as well as terms to refer to female incels and incels of various sexes and sexual preferences, such as: *malecel*, *mancel*, *femcel-lite*, *femcel*, *truefemcel*, *lesbocel*, *queercel*, *rainbowcel*, *transcel*, *intercel*, *kinkcel*. Incels' employment status may also be indicated in the terms used to refer to them, for example in: *NEETcel*, *poorcel*, *STEMcel*, *workcel*. Depending on

their age, incels can be *youngcels* or *oldcels*. Those who are voluntary celibates (i.e. not really *truecels*) are called *volcels*.

The suffix attaches to hosts of several grammatical categories: nouns (*sistercel*), adjectives (*shycel*), acronyms (*NEETcel*), and prefixes (*protocel*). It has originated in a complex expression (involuntary celibate) which was turned into a lexical blend (incel) and the splinter *-cel* has eventually become a derivational affix (*-cel*).

Eighty-one elements based on X-cel schema have been found on the Incel Wiki alone: acnecel, arabcel, autistcel, bad-decisioncel, baldcel, beancel, blackcel, chincel, christocel, countrysidecel, currycel, cutecel, cybercel, denialcel, dickcel, disabledcel, earcel, emcel, escortcel, ethnicel, eyecel, fakecel, fatcel, femcel, femcel-lite, framecel, francel, fuckupcel, greycel, gymcel, gynocel, gynecomastiacel, haircel, hapacel, heightcel, incel, intercel, incompetencel, italiancel, kinkcel, lesbocel, locationcel, malecel, mancel, manchildcel, marcel, medcel, mentalcel, mismatchcel, muslimcel, nearcel, NEETcel, noncel, nosecel, nymphocel, oldcel, persocel, poorcel, protocel, PSSDcel, queercel, rainbowcel, ramuscel, redcel, ricecel, semicel, shycel, sistercel, spergcel, standardcel, STEMcel, stoicel, stuttercel, tacocel, thincel, transcel, truecel, truefemcel, turkcel, uglycel, voicecel, volcel, weebcel, whitecel, workcel, wristcel, youngcel.

6. Conclusion and prospects for further research

In this article I sketch the development of what I consider to be new derivational affixes found in the language of a selected online community. The three elements analysed (*-maxx*, *-mog*, *-cel*) share some similarities in their development which can be described using the theoretical apparatus of construction morphology (Booij, 2010; Hüning and Booij, 2014) coupled with the concept of extensions by analogy (Mattiello, 2017). The emergence of prototypical instances, e.g. *looksmaxxing* in the case of the suffix *-maxx*, and *incel* in the case of the suffix *-cel* has led to the creation of new elements by means of surface analogy. It further extended to accommodate whole series of words, usually grouped into semantic clusters. In the case of the suffix *-mog* there is no clear prototypical element (although *heightmogging* seems to be the best candidate due to its high frequency and salience), however stems to which *-mog* is attached are groupable into semantic clusters and thus also form series of words which further extend via analogy by schema. Constructional schemas created in the process of abstracting away from individual instances of use serve as scaffolding for further extension of the lexicon. Thus, in line with the main tenet of construction morphology, I state that construction is the main locus of change. The schematic constructions analysed (X-*maxx*, X-*mog*, X-*cel*) consist of stems of various grammatical categories (including acronyms and lexicalized complex expressions) and the newly emerged affixes. Each of these affixes has a markedly different pedigree: *-maxx* originates in a clipped and modified verb (to maximize), *-mog* is a modified lexicalized acronym (AMOG – alpha male of the group), whereas *-cel* is a splinter of a lexical blend (from involuntary celibate). What they all have in common is that their emergence can be successfully accounted for using the methodology of construction morphology in general and the concept of constructionalization in particular.

What remains to be investigated is the emergence of other constructions, some of which are already well recognized and observed. For instance the X-*pill* construction (illustrated by e.g. *beastpill*, *blackpill*, *bluepill*, *breadpill*, *camelpill*, *cyanpill*, *dickpill*, *dogpill*, *dollpill*, *greenpill*, *heightpill*, *huepill*, *incestpill*, *ironpill*, *JBpill*, *pinkpill*, *purplepill*, *racepill*, *rapepill*, *redpill*, *shitpill*, *siegepill*, *weebpill*, *whitepill*, *wolfpill*) has been widely used not only in the discourse of the incelosphere, but the manosphere at large (Waśniewska, 2020; Van Valkenburgh, 2021; The Extremist Medicine Cabinet: A Guide to Online "Pills" 2019) and even in the mainstream language. Another construction that seems to be in its early stages of development is X-*fuel*. It is observed mostly in two instances: *lifefuel* (which refers to things which provide motivation to live), and *suicidefuel*/*suifuel*/*ropefuel* (which refer to things that deplete all motivation to live and "fuel" one to commit suicide).

Discourses produced by various online communities are characterized by their own special vocabularies, but also specific uses of language which drive the evolution of these discourses in unprecedented ways. Different language-change processes occur which are peculiar to given communities, and constructionalization is one of them. The derivational affixes used as illustrations in the present article remain in constant use in the incel community and seem to continue increasing in productivity. They may remain hidden in the less-visited corners of the Internet or start emerging from

the shadows and making it into mainstream language. In any case, they are well worth investigating, as language change reflects changes in social reality.

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