In this chapter, I turn to the semantics of de-adjectival nominalisers. More specifically, I deal with the meanings of morphemes and how they combine to form nouns. During the investigation, I explore three tenets of Cognitive Semantics on de-adjectival nominalisations. To that end, I structure the chapter as follows. In section 3.1, I say what a de-adjectival suffix is and enumerate the mechanisms that condition its integration with a root to form a noun. In section 3.2, I argue that a de-adjectival suffix is polysemous and its multiple senses gather around a prototype. In section 3.3, I argue that to reveal the subtle differences in meaning between nominal suffixes, it is necessary to organise them into domains in which they stand as rivals. In section 3.4, I argue that the members of a noun pair differ in terms of the different construals the speaker imposes on their common root. To show non-synonymy, I resort to the distinctive collocates associated with the members of the pair. This is done by examining actual data offered in the corpus. In section 3.5, I recapitulate the key points of the chapter.

3.1 Introduction

A de-adjectival suffix is a word-final element that is added to an adjective to form a noun. It is a bound morpheme because it does not occur alone; it needs to be integrated with a free morpheme. To form a composite structure, the two morphemes should exhibit what Langacker (1987: 277–327) calls valence relations. First, the two morphemes should exhibit correspondence in semantic and phonological specifications. Second, they should exhibit difference in dependence. The free morpheme qualifies as autonomous, whereas the bound morpheme qualifies as dependent. Third, they should exhibit difference in determinacy. The
bound morpheme acts as a profile determinant and so lends its character to the entire structure. As a categorial marker, it changes a lexical item from one class into another. As a meaning marker, it causes a shift of a kind in the semantic structure of the root, and so adds a special meaning to the derived formation. Fourth, they should exhibit difference in function. The bound morpheme functions as the head, while the free morpheme functions as the complement in the structure. In some derivational cases, the root undergoes a phonetic change, as in absence from absent, whereas in others it preserves its phonetic shape, as in captaincy from captain.

3.2 Semantic networks

In this section, I turn to the question of the category theory in morpho-lexicology. The aim is to describe the semantic network of a de-adjectival suffix. A de-adjectival suffix, I argue, is associated with a range of distinct senses. Some senses are regarded as better examples of the category than others. The sense that is the best example of the category is the prototype, whereas the other senses are the periphery. The prototype is the sense that has the key properties of the category. It is the sense that comes to mind first or is the easiest to recall. The peripheral senses are linked to the prototype by a set of semantic principles. To put it differently, the prototype gives rise to a variety of peripheral senses. The peripheral senses have some, but not all, of the properties of the category. Like members of a family, the peripheral senses share the general properties of the category, but they differ in specific details. Category refers to a cognitive ability which organises the different senses of a given structure in the mind, and shows how they are related to one another.

To account for the multiple senses of a de-adjectival suffix and capture its semantic characteristics, I propose the two semantic features of quality and quantity. Let me demonstrate the model by giving an example of the suffix -ce. The suffix -ce combines with an adjectival root to form a noun. Prototypically, the suffix -ce is attached to adjectival roots denoting quality to form abstract nouns, as in absence. Absence is the state of being absent. One step removed from the prototype is the case where the suffix is attached to adjectival roots denoting quantity to form abstract nouns, as in abundance. Abundance is an amount of something that is large in size. Peripherally, the suffix -ce is attached to verbal roots denoting action to form abstract nouns, as in preference. Preference is the act of liking someone or something more than another, or the act of selecting someone or something over another.