

# No prosodic word constraint on German subword Right-Node Raising

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What is Right-Node Raising (RNR)?

(1) Ahmad likes, but Elly hates, romantasy novels.

We refer to the shared element as the pivot.

What is subword RNR?

- (2) a. over- and underestimate
- b. pre- and post-war
- c. socio- and psycholinguists

Subword RNR is more productive in German:

- (3) a. Herren- und Damen-schuhe  
men and women-shoes  
'men's and women's shoes' (compound)
- b. Freund- und Feind-schaft  
friend and enemy-DER  
'friendship and enmity' (derivational suffix)

However, it is not unrestricted:

- (4) \*Prüf- und Untersuch-ung  
assess- and examine-DER  
Intended: 'assessment and examination'  
(cf. Prüfung und Untersuchung)

What is behind the unacceptability of such examples?

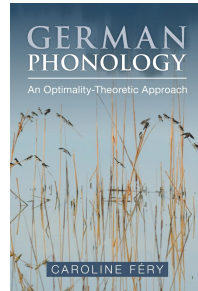
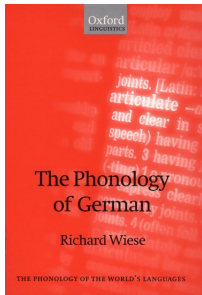
Claim in the previous literature: the pivot cannot be smaller than a prosodic word (PWd,  $\omega$ ).

- (5) a. Herren- und Damen-(schuhe) $\omega$   
men and women-shoes  
'men's and women's shoes'
- b. Freund- und Feind-(schaft) $\omega$   
friend and enemy-DER  
'friendship and enmity'
- c. \*Prüf- und (Untersuch-ung) $\omega$   
assess- and examine-DER  
Intended: 'assessment and examination'

(Höhle, 1982; Booij, 1985; Wiese, 2000; Féry, 2025; see also Artstein, 2005)

# Introduction

This analysis is widely adopted – being able to serve as an RNR pivot is even considered a diagnostic for PWds in German.

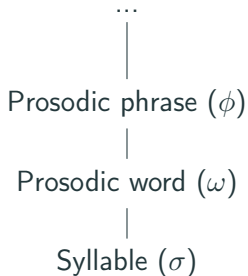


- The primary goal of this talk: convince you that this analysis is incorrect.
- The secondary goal: discuss what else might account for the data.

## Roadmap:

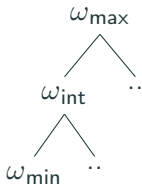
- Introduction
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A very simplified picture of the prosodic hierarchy:



Prosodic words have been argued to be recursive, with minimal, intermediate and maximal levels:

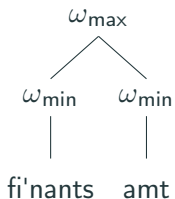
(6)



An example of a recursive prosodic structure: compounds.

(7) a. Finanz-amt     $((\text{fi}'\text{nants})_{\omega} (\text{amt})_{\omega})_{\omega}$     ('tax authority')

b.



The following diagnostics have been argued to apply for minimal, intermediate and maximal PWds alike:

- #1: Must contain a stressable syllable
- #2: Block resyllabification at their left edge
- #3: Can serve as RNR pivots

(Wiese, 2000; Féry, 2025)

PWd diagnostic #1: Must contain a stressable syllable

- All syllables are stressable unless they contain a schwa or an allomorph of schwa (/ɪ/ and /ʊ/).

(8) Bohne                    '(bo:ˌnə)<sub>ω</sub>                    'bean'

- Note that stressability is not the same as stress!

PWd diagnostic #2: Block resyllabification at the left edge

- Resyllabification generally applies word-internally across morpheme boundaries to avoid onset-less syllables,
- Word-internal morpheme boundaries that block resyllabification correspond to the left edges of PWds.

(9) Finanz-amt      ((fi'nants)<sub>ω</sub> (amt)<sub>ω</sub> )<sub>ω</sub>      'tax authority'

PWd diagnostic #3: Can serve as RNR pivots

- Let's look at this in more detail!

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## A PWD constraint on RNR pivots?

Recall:

- (10) a. Herren- und Damen-schuhe  
men and women-shoes  
'men's and women's shoes'
- b. Freund- und Feind-schaft  
friend and enemy-DER  
'friendship and enmity'
- c. \*Prüf- und Untersuch-ung  
assess- and examine-DER  
Intended: 'assessment and examination'

## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

To account for this pattern, it has been argued that the pivot cannot be smaller than a PWd:

- (11) a. Herren- und Damen-(schuhe)<sub>ω</sub>  
men and women-shoes  
'men's and women's shoes'
- b. Freund- und Feind-(schaft)<sub>ω</sub>  
friend and enemy-DER  
'friendship and enmity'
- c. \*Prüf- und (Untersuch-ung)<sub>ω</sub>  
assess- and examine-DER  
Intended: 'assessment and examination'

Let's test whether this is in line with evidence from the other two PWd diagnostics.

## A PWD constraint on RNR pivots?

Let's start with compounds:

- (12) Herren- und Damen-(schuhe)<sub>ω</sub>  
men and women-shoes  
'men's and women's shoes'

The pivot qualifies as a PWD according to the first two diagnostics:

- #1: Must contain a stressable syllable ✓
- #2: Blocks resyllabification at its left edge ✓

- (13) Wasser- und Schiffahrts-(ämter)<sub>ω</sub>  
water and shipping-authorities  
'water and shipping authorities'

## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

Intermediate summary:

- The second parts of compounds are always realized as PWds for the purposes of stressability and resyllabification,
- They can also productively serve as RNR pivots.

So far, the constraint is doing good work!

(But see Neu & Guo, 2025 for some semantic complications.)

## A PWD constraint on RNR pivots?

The crucial test: does the PWD constraint correctly predict which suffixes can be pivots?

- (14) a. Freund- und Feind-schaft  
friend and enemy-DER  
'friendship and enmity'
- b. \*Prüf- und Untersuch-ung  
assess- and examine-DER  
Intended: 'assessment and examination'

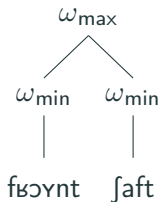
## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

The claim: derivational suffixes fall into two groups, those that can be pivots (pivotable) and those that cannot (non-pivotable). All and only pivotable suffixes are PWds.

# A PWD constraint on RNR pivots?

Two different structures for suffixed words:

(15) a.



Freund-schaft  
(‘friendship’)

b.



Finster-nis  
(‘darkness’)

## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

	Is a PWd
Non-pivotable	<b>x</b>
-ung (/ʊŋ/)	
-nis (/nis/)	
-lich (/lɪç/)	
...	
Pivotable	<b>✓</b>
-schaft (/ʃaft/)	
-keit (/kait/)	
-tum (/tum/)	
...	

(Höhle, 1982; Booij, 1985; Wiese, 2000; Féry, 2025)

## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

Let's apply the other two diagnostics for PWd status:

	Stressable	Block resyllabification
Non-pivotable -ung (/ʊŋ/) -nis (/nis/) -lich (/lɪç/) ...		
Pivotable -schaft (/ʃaft/) -keit (/kait/) -tum (/tum/) ...		

## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

PWd diagnostic #1: Must contain a stressable syllable

- Non-pivotable suffixes (*-ung* /ʊŋ/, *-nis* /nɪs/, *-lich* /lɪç/...): contain a schwa or a schwa allomorph, thus not stressable
- Pivotable suffixes (*-schaft* /ʃaft/, *-keit* /kait/, *-tum* /tum/...): stressable

But stressability does not guarantee PWd status!

## A PWD constraint on RNR pivots?

	Stressable	Block resyllabification
Non-pivotable -ung (/ʊŋ/) -nis (/nis/) -lich (/lɪç/) ...	✗	
Pivotable -schaft (/ʃaft/) -keit (/kait/) -tum (/tum/) ...	✓ (but not conclusive)	

## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

PWd diagnostic #2: Block resyllabification at the left edge

- Non-pivotable suffixes (*-ung* /ʊŋ/, *-nis* /nɪs/, *-lich* /lɪç/...): do not block resyllabification

(16) Prüf-ung                      pʁy.fʊŋ                      'assessment'

- Pivotable suffixes (*-schaft* /ʃaft/, *-keit* /kait/, *-tum* /tum/...): these are all consonant-initial – resyllabification is not expected to apply in the first place

## A PWD constraint on RNR pivots?

	Stressable	Block resyllabification
Non-pivotable <i>-ung</i> (/ʊŋ/) <i>-nis</i> (/nis/) <i>-lich</i> (/lɪç/) ...	✗	✗ (if applicable)
Pivotable <i>-schaft</i> (/ʃaft/) <i>-keit</i> (/kait/) <i>-tum</i> (/tum/) ...	✓ (but not conclusive)	NA

# A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

Bottom line so far:

	Is a PWd
Non-pivotable	<b>X</b>
-ung (/ʊŋ/)	
-nis (/nis/)	
-lich (/lɪç/)	
...	
Pivotable	<b>???</b>
-schaft (/ʃaft/)	
-keit (/kait/)	
-tum (/tum/)	
...	

## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

The only reason why we would assume that some suffixes are PWds is to explain why they can be used as RNR pivots.

Does this at least hold up?

## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

We find licit examples of RNR where the pivot contains a schwa or an allomorph of schwa and thus cannot be a PWd:

- (17) a. mütter- und väter-lich  
mother- and father-ly  
'motherly and fatherly'
- b. Brüder- und Schwester-chen  
brother- and sister-DIM  
'little brother and little sister'

These are isolated exceptions – in most contexts, *-lich* and *-chen* cannot be pivots.

(Wiese, 2000)

## A PWD constraint on RNR pivots?

But suffixes that are allegedly PWDs cannot serve as RNR pivots across the board either:

- (18) a. Freund- und Feind-schaft  
friend and enemy-DER  
'friendship and enmity'
- b. \*Eltern- und Gefangen-schaft  
parent and captive-DER  
Intended: 'parenthood and captivity'

There is no clear line between pivotable and non-pivotable suffixes in the first place.

# A PWD constraint on RNR pivots?

## Summary:

- There is no independent evidence that some suffixes are PWDs,
- The constraint fails to correctly separate acceptable from unacceptable examples,
- Whether subword RNR is acceptable is not predictable from the suffix alone.

## A PWd constraint on RNR pivots?

It is possible that a more minimal constraint requires RNR pivots to be at least a syllable:

- (19) a. Freund- und Feind-(schaft)<sub>σ</sub>  
friend and enemy-DER  
'friendship and enmity'
- b. \*Prüf- und Untersu(ch-ung)<sub>σ</sub>  
assess- and examine-DER  
Intended: 'assessment and examination'

## A PWD constraint on RNR pivots?

... but not all syllabic affixes can be pivots:

- (20) a. \*Eltern- und Gefangen-(schaft)<sub>σ</sub>  
parent and captive-DER  
Intended: 'parenthood and captivity'
- b. \*Ereig- und Ärger-(nis)<sub>σ</sub>  
occur and annoy-DER  
Intended: 'occurrence and annoyance'

Prosody is not enough to account for the data.

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## What else constrains subword RNR?

The explanandum:

- (21) a. Freund- und Feind-schaft  
friend and enemy-DER  
'friendship and enmity'
- b. mütter- und väter-lich  
mother- and father-ly  
'motherly and fatherly'
- c. \*Eltern- und Gefangen-schaft  
parent and captive-DER  
Intended: 'parenthood and captivity'
- d. \*Ereig- und Ärger-nis  
happen and annoy-DER  
Intended: 'event and annoyance'

## What else constrains subword RNR?

A cross-linguistic perspective:

- In Turkish, derivational affixes have been argued to be unable to serve as RNR pivots.
- However, exceptions are attested:

(22) ana     ve     baba-lık  
      mother and father-DER  
      ‘motherhood and fatherhood’

(Akkuş, 2016; Kabak, 2007; Kornfilt, 2012)

## What else constrains subword RNR?

We are currently looking at these effects experimentally and computationally:

- With some derivational affixes, the acceptability of subword RNR depends on the frequency of the coordinated phrase (e.g., *ana ve baba* ‘mother and father’).
- Our hypothesis: coordinated phrases can be either decomposed in processing or parsed holistically. For more frequent phrases, a holistic parse is more likely – and only the latter is compatible with subword RNR.
- The same might hold for German.

(Neu et al., 2026; see also Morgan & Levy 2015, 2016)

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Phrasal RNR has been argued to always require contrastive focus:

(23) Ahmad likes, but Elly hates, romantasy novels.

- Contrastive interpretation of the two conjuncts
- A distinctive intonational contour

(Hartmann, 2001)

Does the same hold for subword RNR?

(24) The museum's new exhibit explores the city's architecture in its pre- and post-war periods.

- Are the conjuncts marked with contrastive focus?
- Do we hear the distinctive intonational contour of contrastive focus? Do we expect to hear it?

Tell me in the Q&A!

Thanks to Kristine Yu and Bettina Braun.

And thanks to you!

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