

## SUFFIXATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY ENGLISH SLANG: A CASE STUDY OF DERIVATIONAL SEMANTICS

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The present article focuses on exploring the phenomenon of suffixation actively contributing to English slang lexicon in the 21st century. Suffixation is understood as a word formation mechanism in which postpositional auxiliary morphemes with associative derivational meaning (suffixes) serve as a means of semantic change in denotation, connotation or both. As this form of affixation is capable of conveying a wide range of stylistic, expressive, emotional, and evaluative connotations, it is especially productive in English slang, given its colloquial, informal, and substandard nature. It equally remains historically one of the major word-formation mechanisms invariably replenishing English slang. According to the present research, three substantival (*-er, -ie, and -ing*) and one participial (*-ed*) suffixes are labelled as highly productive, accounting for the formation of overall 381 slang items (or 75.3% of all suffixal neologisms). The lexical material represents a selection from three English slang dictionaries, namely “The concise new Partridge dictionary of slang and unconventional English” (2008), “Vice slang” (2008), and “The Routledge dictionary of modern American slang and unconventional English” (2009). Semantically, the substantival suffixes are found to express objectness denominating: animate entities based on their appearance, behaviour patterns or character traits, object of activity, origin, and professional or recreational activities; inanimate entities based on their function, functional location, origin, physical characteristics, and production method; phenomena based on their causers; actions or states based on their characteristics. The only participial suffix attested, apart from traditionally conveying attributiveness as a result of an action, equally reveals a novel meaning – ‘alcohol- or drug-intoxicated’, when either the morphemically segmented root does not exist as a separate lexeme / as a morpheme within a derivative, and is, therefore, semantically unattested, or the root formally exists as a separate lexeme / as a morpheme within a derivative but is semantically incompatible with the slang neologism.

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## СУФІКСАЦІЯ У СЛЕНГУ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ХХІ СТОЛІТТЯ З ПОГЛЯДУ ДЕРИВАЦІЙНОЇ СЕМАНТИКИ

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**Ключові слова:** *сленг англійської мови, неосленгізм, суфіксація, суфікс, високопродуктивний суфікс, іменниковий суфікс, дієприкметниковий суфікс, словотвірне значення, предметність, ознаковість.*

Стаття присвячена проблемі дослідження явища суфіксації, яка активно поповнює лексикон англійського сленгу у ХХІ столітті. Суфіксація розуміється як спосіб словотвору, в якому постпозиційні допоміжні морфеми з асоціативним дериваційним значенням (суфікси) служать засобом семантичної зміни денотації, конотації або і денотації, і конотації. Оскільки досліджувана форма афіксації здатна передавати широкий спектр стилістичних, експресивних, емоційних та оцінних конотацій, вона характеризується особливою продуктивністю в англійському сленгу з огляду на його розмовну, неформальну та субстандартну природу. Водночас в історичному плані це один з основних механізмів словотвору, який незмінно поповнює англійський сленг. У нашому дослідженні три іменникові (*-er, -ie, -ing*) та один дієприкметниковий (*-ed*) суфікси визначаємо як високопродуктивні, оскільки за допомогою них утворився сумарно 381 сленгізм (що становить 75,3% від усіх суфіксативно-новотворів). Аналізований лексичний матеріал отриманий методом суцільної вибірки з трьох тлумачних словників сленгу англійської мови, а саме “The concise new Partridge dictionary of slang and unconventional English” (2008), “Vice slang” (2008) та “The Routledge dictionary of modern American slang and unconventional English” (2009). Із погляду семантики, аналізовані іменникові форманти виражають предметність, що позначає: істот за зовнішніми ознаками, моделями поведінки чи рисами характеру, об’єктом діяльності, походженням та професійною чи рекреаційною діяльністю; неістот за походженням, способом виробництва, фізичними характеристиками, функціональним призначенням та функціональним розташуванням; явища за їхніми причинами; дії чи стани за їхніми характеристиками. Єдиний засвідчений дієприкметниковий суфікс, окрім своєї традиційної семантики ознаковості як результату дії, розвинув також нове значення – ‘який перебуває в стані алкогольного або наркотичного сп’яніння’. Новизна семи в цьому разі визначається за допомогою морфемного аналізу, коли або вичленуваний корінь не існує як окрема лексема / як морфема у складі деривата, і є відтак семантично незасвідченим, або корінь формально існує як окрема лексема / як морфема у складі деривата, але семантично не співвідноситься з неосленгізмом.

**Introduction.** The contemporary anthropocentric paradigm revolves around placing the human being at the forefront of cognition. This trend is reflected in the global shift from the prototypical and collective to the atypical and individual, which equally influences and reshapes the very fabric of scientific focus. Several decades ago, linguistics used to prioritize the study of those phenomena which constituted the “nucleus” of language structure. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, this does not seem to be the case any longer: peripheral

facts are regarded as inalienable from scientific focus in that they are capable of showcasing the diversity of the world we live in, whether expressed in individual speech, collective code, language system or cognitive constructs yet to be verbalized. Therefore, extensive academic endeavour in the field of sociolects, including slang as a truly international and interlingual phenomenon of British English origin [1], best exemplifies this relentless and evergrowing anthropocentrization trend.

Formation of English slang is an issue of utmost interest for not only slang researchers but equally experts in semantics, derivatology, neology, onomastics, borrowing theory, etymology etc. in that it identifies traditional and novel word formation mechanisms and tools; determines the most common patterns of metaphorization and metonymization in English vocabulary at a given stage of its evolution; outlines the essential sources of borrowings and calques as a marker of language contacts between diverse nations and communities alike. Various aspects of English slang have been closely investigated by numerous scholars, including its discreteness (M. Adams [2], J. Coleman [3]), social nature (C. Eble [4], A.-B. Stenström [5]), and diversity (M. Widawski [6], A. Lillo and T. Victor [7]). Slang formation has been actively studied by O. Klymenko [8], E. Mattiello [9], A. Yelistratov [10], to name but a few. Furthermore, the 2020s saw the emergence of a novel area of research – slang neology – co-founded by O. Dziubina [11] and D. Borys [12]. Its focus bears primarily on the word-formation mechanisms and tools that have proved productive in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is within the framework of this very branch that the present article falls.

**The purpose of the article** is threefold. Firstly, my aim is to inventory the most productive suffixes involved in the formation of English slang vocabulary in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Secondly, the suffixes featured in the slang items under study are to be classified and described from a semantic perspective in order to identify which derivational meanings are most typical of present-day English slang neologisms. Thirdly, it is crucial to determine whether the identified derivational meanings are traditional or novel to English derivatology.

**The database of the research** is 506 suffixal slang neologisms. These represent a selection from three English slang dictionaries, namely “The concise new Partridge dictionary of slang and unconventional English” (2008), “Vice slang” (2008), and “The Routledge dictionary of modern American slang and unconventional English” (2009). However, as the present article is only a fragment of a more extensive research, my attention will be focused on a selection of only as many as 381 (or 75.3%) recently coined slang items formed with the help of the four most productive suffixes: *-ed*, *-er*, *-ie*, and *-ing*. What attests to the highest productivity of these morphemes is not only that they have contributed to the emergence of an enormous number of words throughout English history but also that each one accounts for the formation of more than 10% of the suffixal items under study.

**Presentation of the main material.** Suffixation is a mechanism of word formation in which postpositional auxiliary morphemes with associative derivational

meaning (suffixes) serve as a means of semantic change in denotation, connotation or both. As suffixation is capable of conveying a wide range of stylistic, expressive, emotional, and evaluative connotations, it is especially productive in English slang, given its colloquial, informal, and substandard nature.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century English slang, as few as four suffixes account for the formation of 75.3% of suffixal neologisms. These include three substantival suffixes (*-er*, *-ie* and *-ing*) and one participial suffix (*-ed*).

The substantival suffixes under study express objectness by which is meant the grammatical meaning of substance traditionally attributable to nouns and underlying the lexico-grammatical categories of animacy / inanimacy, commonness / properness, singularity / plurality, collectivity, etc. An important feature of this group of affixes is morphemic polysemy, which allows for one and the same suffix to convey distinct derivational meanings in different words.

#### Suffix *-er*

The morpheme *-er* is the most productive substantival suffix in the 21<sup>st</sup> century English slang, accounting for the formation of 141 neologisms. This affix conveys overall eight aspects of **objectness**, denoting **animate entities**, **inanimate entities**, and **actions/states**.

The suffix expresses three aspects of **objectness**, denominating **animate entities based on their**:

1) **appearance**, e.g. *bling-blinger* ‘a successful or established member of the hip-hop community’ [13, p. 65] (derivational base *bling-bling* ‘(sl.) wealth, especially as manifested in expensive but tasteless jewellery’); *six-packer* ‘a man with well-defined abdominal muscles’ [13, p. 585] (derivational base *six-pack* ‘(sl.) well-defined abdominal muscles’);

2) **behaviour patterns or character traits**, e.g. *bottler* ‘a coward, someone who loses nerve’ [13, p. 84] (derivational base *bottle* ‘(sl.) to lose one’s nerve’); *fudger* ‘a planespotter who claims greater success than is true’ [13, p. 275] (derivational base *fudge* ‘(sl.) to cheat’);

3) **professional or recreational activities**, e.g. *clubber* ‘a patron of nightclubs’ [13, p. 149] (derivational base *club*); *shusher* ‘bouncer’ [13, p. 581] (derivational base *shush*).

The suffix equally conveys three aspects of **objectness**, designating **inanimate entities based on their**:

1) **function**, e.g. *hitter* ‘a crack cocaine pipe designed for a single inhalation’ [13, p. 335] (derivational base *hit* ‘(sl.) a single inhalation of crack cocaine’); *traveler* ‘alcohol taken in a car on the way to a party or concert’ [14, p. 1006] (derivational base *travel*);

2) **origin**, e.g. *backyarder* ‘a surfboard built by or modified by an amateur’ [13, p. 25] (derivational base

*backyard [butchery]* ‘(sl.) an amateur’s modification of a surfboard’); *clinker* ‘a piece of broken-up ice on the water’ [13, p. 147] (derivational base *clink*);

3) **physical characteristics**, e.g. *bloater* ‘a fat person’ [13, p. 66] (derivational base *bloat*); *zipper* ‘an electronic display of news or publicity which is scrolled across a screen fixed to a building’ [13, p. 718] (derivational base *zip*).

Furthermore, the suffix serves to denote **phenomena based on their causers**, as in *mortaller* ‘a terrible thing’ [13, p. 440] (derivational base *mortal [sin]*).

The derivational meaning of **objectness of actions or states based on their characteristics** expressed by the morpheme *-er* can be found in the slang neologisms *crisper* ‘a commissioned act of arson’ [13, p. 173] (derivational base *crisp[y]* ‘(sl.) a badly burnt person or corpse’) or *deadner* ‘a blow, a thump’ [13, p. 190] (derivational base *deaden*). In both examples the suffix associates an action with its result.

#### Suffix *-ie*

The morpheme *-ie* alongside its allomorphs *-ey* and *-y* is the second most productive noun suffix, which is attested in 68 slang neologisms and covers as many as eight aspects of **objectness** designating **animate entities, inanimate entities, phenomena, actions, and states**.

The suffix conveys four aspects of **objectness**, denominating **animate entities based on their:**

1) **appearance**, e.g. *brownie* ‘a black person’ [13, p. 94] (derivational base *brown*); *grungie* ‘a filthy person’ [13, p. 14] (derivational base *grunge*);

2) **behaviour patterns or character traits**, e.g. *flightie* ‘a person who has downshifted to the Highlands of Scotland from urban England’ [13, p. 258] (derivational base *[take] flight*);

3) **object of activity**, e.g. *leaguey* ‘a Rugby League player or follower’ [13, p. 395] (derivational base *[Rugby] League*); *shoppy* ‘a shop-keeper’ [13, p. 577] (derivational base *shop*);

4) **origin**, e.g. *Honky* ‘a person from Hong Kong’ [13, p. 340] (derivational base *Honk[ers]* ‘(sl.) Hong Kong’); *townie* ‘any member of a subcultural urban adolescent grouping that seems to be defined by a hip-hop dress and jewellery sense’ [13, p. 662] (derivational base *town*).

Furthermore, the suffix expresses three aspects of **objectness**, designating **inanimate entities based on their:**

1) **function**, e.g. *lunchie* ‘a lunchtime drink consumed instead of a meal’ [13, p. 412] (derivational base *lunch*); *windy* ‘a windproof jacket and over-trousers’ [13, p. 702] (derivational base *wind[proof]*);

2) **physical characteristics**, e.g. *brownie* ‘amphetamine; MDMA’ [13, p. 94] (derivational base *brown* ‘(sl.) an amphetamine tablet’); *tally* ‘(chiefly in

*Queensland*) a tall, 750 ml bottle of beer’ [13, p. 639] (derivational base *tall[boy]* ‘(sl.) a 16-ounce can of beer’);

3) **production method**, e.g. *roastie* ‘roast potatoes’ [13, p. 543] (derivational base *roast*).

The derivational meaning of **objectness of actions or states based on their characteristics** expressed by the morpheme *-ie* is well exemplified by the slang neologism *lowey* ‘a period of clinical depression’ [13, p. 411] (derivational base *low*). Another instance of objectness of an action – by the location of its performance – is *lappy* ‘in Queensland, a circuit of a street block in a vehicle done, especially repeatedly, for entertainment’ [13, p. 392] (derivational base *lap*).

#### Suffix *-ing*

The morpheme *-ing* alongside its colloquial allomorph *-in* is the third most productive noun suffix, which accounts for the formation of 56 slang neologisms. However, in comparison to the suffixes *-er* and *-ie* described above, the range of derivational meanings expressed by *-ing* is much more limited, being confined to two aspects of **objectness** designating:

1) **inanimate entities based on their functional location**, e.g. *hipping* ‘a diaper; a sanitary towel’ [13, p. 334] (derivational base *hip*);

2) **actions based on their characteristics**, e.g. *bro-ing* ‘in market research, the testing of fashion prototypes in inner-city, predominantly black neighbourhoods’ [13, p. 93] (derivational base *bro* ‘(sl.) a fellow black’); *jugging* ‘in prison, an attack with a jug of boiling sugared water’ [13, p. 374] (derivational base *jug* ‘(sl.) to attack someone with a jug of boiling water, especially sugared water’).

#### Suffix *-ed*

The only highly productive participial suffix identified in this research is *-ed*, which is attested in 116 slang neologisms. The morpheme predominantly retains its original past participial meaning of **attributiveness as a result of an action**, as in *castled* ‘in cricket, bowled out’ [13, p. 122] (derivational base *castle* ‘the wicket that a batsman is defending’); *fitted* ‘well-dressed’ [14, p. 369] (derivational base *fit* ‘(sl.) an outfit’); *munted* ‘having become sexually intimate with an unattractive, promiscuous drunk’ [13, p. 447] (derivational base *mun(ter)* ‘an unattractive young woman who is drunk and/or promiscuous’); *shredded* ‘muscular and extremely lean’ [14, p. 879] (derivational base *shred* ‘to cut off’ as an allusion to removal of anything extraneous to muscle, i.e. retained body water, excess fat, etc.).

It is noteworthy, however, that the 21<sup>st</sup> century English slang has seen the emergence of a novel, previously unattested, derivational meaning of the suffix *-ed* – ‘**alcohol- or drug-intoxicated**’. In general, participial neologisms designating drunkenness or drug intoxication are legion in the material under

study. Nonetheless, in the majority of examples it is either the root (e.g. *bongo-ed* ‘drug-intoxicated, especially as a result of marijuana’ [15, p. 23] from *bongo* ‘a marijuana cigarette’ or *gacked* ‘cocaine-intoxicated’ [13, p. 278] from *gack* ‘cocaine’) or the analogous word-formation (e.g. *banjaxed* ‘drunk’ [13, p. 32] from *banjax* ‘to batter’ or *paggered* ‘drunk’ [13, p. 480] from *pagger* ‘to break’ by analogy with *smashed* ‘drunk’) that account for the emergence of each specific lexical item. Yet, in a number of cases, the derivational base supplying the lexical (denotative) meaning of alcohol- or drug-intoxication is unidentifiable. The morphemic analysis of such items allows for delimiting two groups of words:

1) the neologisms whose root does not exist as a separate lexeme or as a morpheme within a derivative, and is, therefore, semantically unattested (\*), e.g. *boohonged* ‘drunk’ [13, p. 80] (potential derivational base \**boohong*); *mandoo-ed* ‘drunk’ [13, p. 419] (potential derivational base \**mandoo*); *schwallyed* ‘drunk’ [13, p. 560] (potential derivational base \**schwally*); *tasher-ed* ‘drunk’ [13, p. 641] (potential derivational base \**tasher*);

2) the neologisms whose root formally exists as a separate lexeme or as a morpheme within a derivative but is semantically incompatible with the slang neologism under analysis, e.g. *ankled* ‘drunk’ [13, p. 13] (the potential derivational base \**ankle* designates a joint); *giffed* ‘п’яний’ [13, p. 288] (the potential derivational base \**giff* is only found in *giffer* ‘a pickpocket’); *scammered* ‘drunk’ [13, p. 559] (the potential derivational base \**scammer* denotes a fraudster).

**Conclusions.** Suffixation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century retains its position as one of the major word-formation mechanisms invariably replenishing English slang. According to the present research, three substantival (*-er*, *-ie*, and *-ing*) and one participial (*-ed*) suffixes were labelled as highly productive, accounting for the formation of overall 381 slang items (or 75.3% of all suffixal neologisms). Semantically, the substantival auxiliary morphemes under study have been found to express objectness denominating: animate entities based on their appearance, behaviour patterns or character traits, object of activity, origin, and professional or recreational activities; inanimate entities based on their function, functional location, origin, physical characteristics, and production method; phenomena based on their causers; actions or states based on their characteristics. The only participial suffix attested has, apart from traditionally conveying attributiveness as a result of an action, equally developed a novel meaning – ‘alcohol- or drug-intoxicated’. Further studies focusing on less productive suffixes as well as prefixes will need to be undertaken to enhance our understanding of how English slang is formed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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