

## -ER DERIVATIVES IN MODERN ENGLISH

JADWIGA NAWROCKA-FISIAK

*Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań*

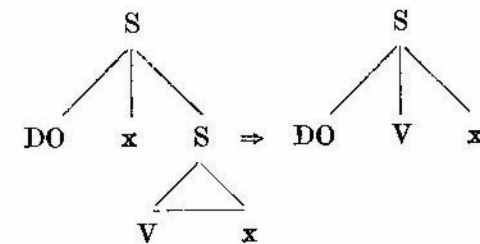
The English *-er* derivatives from the point of view of the base of derivation may be divided into three groups:

1. *Deverbal derivatives*, e.g. *singer, runner, smoker, driver, inspector, computer, chopper, slicer*, etc.
2. *Denominal derivatives*, e.g. *islander, villager, clubber, staffer, perfumer, glover, docker, gardener, piper*, etc.
3. *Deadjectival derivatives*, e.g. *foreigner, stranger, bester, loner, goner*, etc.

Since the third group consists of less than ten words, it will not be analyzed in the present paper.

From the semantic point of view both deverbal and denominal *-er* derivatives may be further subdivided into *Agents, Experiencers, Instruments, Objects, Goals* and *Locatives*. All of these types will be analyzed below. The analysis will be based on a modified version of Fillmore's CG (Nawrocka-Fisiak 1974: 40-42) and Dowty's discussion of predicates (Dowty 1972).

For the sake of simplicity, the "compositional" level of analysis of predicates will be left out from further considerations. We will start with the level which is a direct input into the nominalization transformation, i.e., when analyzing *Agentives* like *runner, hiker, voter*, etc., we will disregard the Predicate-Raising transformation which raises V to the level of DO (as in the diagram below):



We will concentrate only on the level where DO has already given the argument x an agentive interpretation and hence the formulas for each derivative will have the form:

$$\overline{V-A}$$

and the prelexical transformation is of the type

$$\overline{V-A} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

where V=verb, A=Agentive case, Af=agentive suffix.

### A. Deverbal derivatives.

Deverbal derivatives exhibit the following semantic types:

#### 1. Agent

$$a. \overline{V-A} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

<i>actor</i>	<i>snooper</i>
<i>ambler</i>	<i>hiker</i>
<i>boxer</i>	<i>plotter</i>
<i>commuter</i>	<i>runner</i>
<i>voter</i>	<i>streaker</i>

$$b. \overline{V-A-G} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

G=Goal (here unspecified)

<i>builder</i>	<i>writer</i>
<i>composer</i>	<i>forgery</i>
<i>designer</i>	<i>destroyer</i>
<i>constructor</i>	<i>cutler</i>
<i>inventor</i>	<i>producer</i>

$$c. \overline{V-A-O} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

O=Object (here unspecified)

<i>rider</i>	<i>reader</i>
<i>exporter</i>	<i>founder</i>
<i>driver</i>	<i>learner</i>
<i>drinker</i>	<i>publisher</i>
<i>smoker</i>	<i>tuner</i>

$$d. \overline{V-A-P} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

P=Patient (here unspecified)

<i>entertainer</i>	<i>commander</i>
<i>examiner</i>	<i>offender</i>
<i>seducer</i>	<i>murderer</i>
<i>killer</i>	<i>ruler</i>
<i>teaser</i>	<i>trainer</i>

$$e. \overline{V-A-(O)(P)} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

<i>betrayor</i>	<i>watcher</i>
<i>backer</i>	<i>admirer</i>
<i>concealer</i>	<i>inspector</i>
<i>defender</i>	<i>hider</i>
<i>organizer</i>	<i>announcer</i>

$$f. \overline{V-A-I} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

I=Instrument (here unspecified)

<i>skier</i>
<i>skater</i>

$$g. \overline{V-A-P-O} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

<i>adviser</i>	<i>giver</i>
<i>briber</i>	<i>teacher</i>
<i>creditor</i>	<i>leaser</i>
<i>informer</i>	<i>borrower</i>
<i>granter</i>	<i>renter</i>

$$h. \overline{V-A-O-L} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

<i>engraver</i>
<i>boxer</i> 'one who puts things in boxes'
<i>bottler</i> 'one who puts liquor in bottles'
<i>tinner</i> 'one who puts meat, fruit in tins'
<i>packer</i> 'one who puts things into packages'

$$i. \overline{V-A-O-I} \longrightarrow V+Af$$

<i>brusher</i>	<i>gunner</i>
<i>ironer</i>	<i>tower</i>
<i>gluer</i>	<i>hammerer</i>

<i>raker</i>	<i>nailer</i>
<i>plower</i>	<i>bomber</i>

in the meaning "one who does something with the use of some device like a brush, glue, iron, etc."

## 2. Experiencer

$$a. \overline{V-E} \longrightarrow V+Ef$$

E=Experiencer, Ef=Experiencer suffix

<i>griever</i>	<i>giggler</i>
<i>worrier</i>	<i>sufferer</i>
<i>thinker</i>	<i>stinker</i>
<i>weeper</i>	

$$b. \overline{V-E-(O)(P)} \longrightarrow V+Ef$$

<i>hearer</i>	<i>receiver</i>
<i>believer</i>	<i>imaginer</i>
<i>loser</i>	<i>spotter</i>
<i>deserver</i>	<i>dreamer</i>
<i>winner</i>	<i>gainer</i>

## 3. Instrument

$$a. \overline{V-A-O-I} \longrightarrow V+If$$

If=Instrumental suffix

<i>linder</i>	<i>mower</i>
<i>bomber</i>	<i>glider</i>
<i>gripper</i>	<i>trawler</i>
<i>driller</i>	<i>raider</i>
<i>reaper</i>	<i>fighter</i>
<i>beater</i>	<i>carrier</i>
<i>fertilizer</i>	<i>condenser</i>
<i>atomizer</i>	<i>cruiser</i>
<i>cleanser</i>	<i>mineralizer</i>

## 4. Object

$$a. \overline{V-O} \longrightarrow V+Of$$

Of=Object suffix

<i>reminder</i>	'something reminding'
<i>cracker</i>	'something cracking'

<i>reader</i>	'something for reading'
<i>streamer</i>	'something streaming'
<i>broiler</i>	'a chicken suitable for broiling'
<i>roaster</i>	'a chicken suitable for roasting'
<i>boiler</i>	'a vegetable suitable for boiling'
<i>cooker</i>	'a kind of fruit, etc. grown for cooking'

## 5. Goal

$$a. \overline{V-G} \longrightarrow V+Gf$$

Gf=Goal suffix

<i>folder</i>	<i>starcher</i>
<i>poster</i>	<i>merger</i>
<i>disclaimer</i>	<i>detainer</i>
<i>ouster</i>	

## 6. Locative

$$a. \overline{V-A-L} \longrightarrow V+Lf$$

L=Locative, Lf=Locative suffix

<i>kneeler</i>	<i>jotter</i>
<i>diner</i>	<i>smoker</i>
<i>sleeper</i>	

$$b. \overline{V-A-O-L} \longrightarrow V+Lf$$

<i>boiler</i>	<i>dresser</i>
<i>cooker</i>	<i>hatcher</i>
<i>locker</i>	<i>server</i>
<i>cooler</i>	<i>brazier</i>
<i>counter</i>	<i>dipper</i>

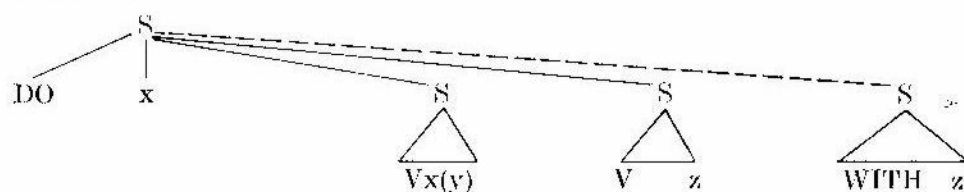
One may argue whether the words in the last two groups should not receive an Instrumental analysis<sup>1</sup>. Since we regard *Instrumental* as a "device with which one does something" and the words in question have to be paraphrasable rather as "a device ON (IN, AT...) which one does something", the *Locative* analysis of these words seems to be more plausible.

<sup>1</sup> Lakoff (1970 : 31) regards *refrigerator* as an instrument, "a device with which one refrigerates things", but Marchand (1965) says the instrument by means of which something is done may come to be looked upon as the place where the action is done if the idea of place is more in evidence than the idea of instrumentality.

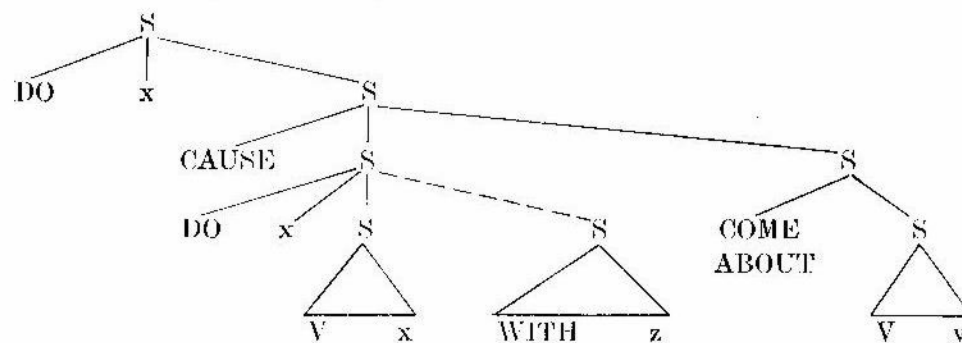
Both *Locative* groups as well as the *Instrumental* group suggest a modification of Dowty's analysis for our purposes. The underlying semantic structures of activities and accomplishments will have to contain an optional node for a variable<sup>2</sup> expressing *Instrumentality* or *Location*. Since *Instruments* presuppose an *Agentive* (Fillmore 1971:44), the optional *Instrument* node should be associated with the atomic predicate DO.

The modified structures have the following form:

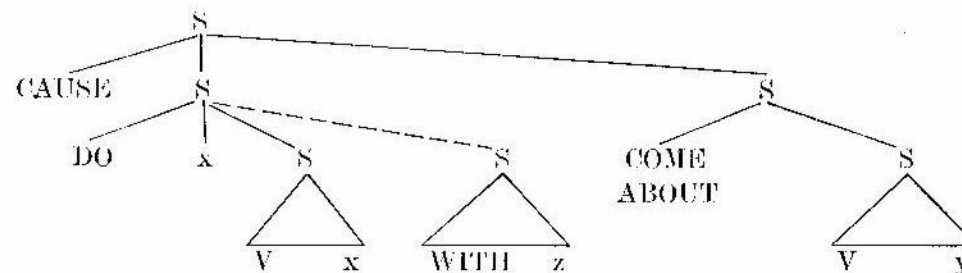
### 1. Activities



### 2. Intentional Agentive Accomplishments



### 2. Non-intentional Agentive Accomplishments



### B. Denominal derivatives.

We believe that the kind of analysis applied to deverbal derivatives may also be extended to words like *Londoner*, *islander*, *leaguer*, *glover*, *jeweller*,

*trader*, *banker*, *geographer*, etc., except that the "conflation"<sup>2</sup> does not occur between the verb and one of the roles, but between two roles attached to "a 'generalized verb' which contains the minimal set of semantic features which characterize all variants in the set" (Lees 1970:182), and which is not lexicalized later on.

The denominal derivatives represent the following semantic types:

#### 1. Patient

$$\overline{V-P-L} \longrightarrow L+Pf$$

V=live in, inhabit

<i>Londoner</i>	<i>New Zealander</i>
<i>Berliner</i>	<i>villager</i>
<i>southerner</i>	<i>highlander</i>
<i>islander</i>	<i>Midlander</i>

#### 2. Agent

Here we distinguish the following subgroups which are determined by the meaning of V:

$$a. \overline{V-A-O} \longrightarrow O+Af$$

1. V=belong to, be a member, ...

<i>leaguer</i>	<i>staffer</i>
<i>liber</i>	<i>clubber</i>

2. V=produce, make, ...

<i>glover</i>	<i>saddler</i>
<i>hatter</i>	<i>brusher</i>
<i>clogger</i>	<i>nailer</i>
<i>potter</i>	<i>roper</i>

3. V=deal in, trade in, be concerned with, ...

<i>jeweller</i>	<i>grocer</i>
<i>confectioner</i>	<i>haberdasher</i>
<i>stationer</i>	<i>financier</i>
<i>perfumer</i>	<i>trader</i>

4. V=be in charge of, manage sth, ...

<i>carter</i>	<i>treasurer</i>
<i>waggoner</i>	<i>banker</i>

<sup>2</sup> The term is used by Fillmore (1971).

<i>craner</i>	<i>rancher</i>
<i>brigadier</i>	<i>miller</i>

5. V= $\overline{\text{to be skilled in, to specialize in, to practise -graphy, -mancy, ...}}$

<i>lexicographer</i>	<i>philosopher</i>
<i>astronomer</i>	<i>typographer</i>
<i>biographer</i>	<i>photographer</i>
<i>ethnographer</i>	<i>cartographer</i>

b.  $V-\overline{A-L} \longrightarrow L+Af$

V= $\overline{\text{be employed in, work in/on, ...}}$

<i>gardener</i>	<i>holder</i> 'a workman employed in a ship's hold'
<i>docker</i>	<i>rancher</i>
<i>kitchener</i>	<i>fielder</i>

c.  $V-\overline{A-I} \longrightarrow I+Af$

V= $\overline{\text{to play sth, ...}}$

<i>drummer</i>	<i>harper</i>
<i>piper</i>	<i>dart</i>
<i>trumpeter</i>	<i>dicer</i>
<i>fiddler</i>	<i>bowler</i>

Since the cases are hierarchically ordered, according to Fillmore (1971 : 42), the nominalization transformation operating on nominal bases will change their order. The case which serves as determinatum will have to precede the one which functions as a determinant.

In analyzing the denominal derivatives we have found out that the number of words falling into one semantic pattern is limited to one or two examples, as in the case of *trencher*, "one who digs trenches", *bencher*, *probationer*, *customer*, *pensioner*, *practitioner*, etc. Such instances will be left out of further consideration. It is obvious that setting up an 'ad hoc' rule which will cover only one or two derivatives is a very costly procedure.

The analysis of English *-er* derivatives represented by the numerous types which were presented above has revealed several factors heretofore unknown.

The *-er* suffix may be attached to predicates with any number of arguments, both those which are lexicalized in the process of lexical insertion as well as to abstract predicates signalling a general relation between different arguments. The only difference between the two instances is that in the first case the "conflation" occurs between the predicate and one of its arguments; in the second case it occurs between two arguments attached to a "generalized verb",

and one of the arguments serves as the stem to which the *-er* suffix is being attached.

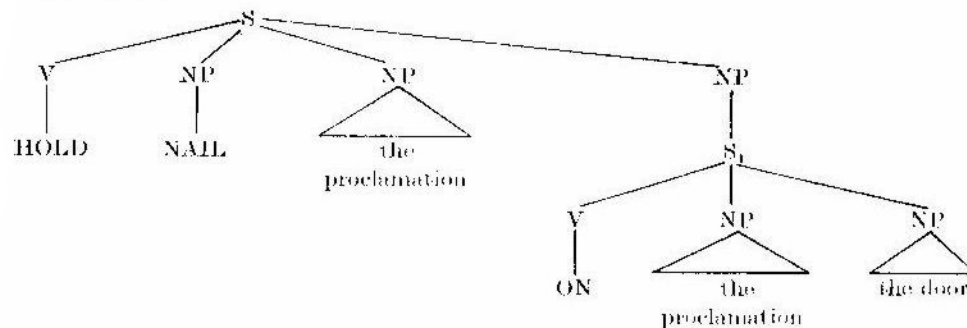
There is, on the whole, no difference between one-place and n-place predicate if other roles in the frame remain unspecified for their lexical content (that is, if they are equivalent to indefinite pronouns in the surface structure). The rule which is responsible for nullifying the difference is "an indefinite pronoun deletion rule" (Shopen 1973 : 69) operating on the parts of propositions which are grammatically indeterminate.

In many cases the nominalization transformation is preceded by some kind of lexical incorporation transformation (hinted at by McCawley 1971<sup>3</sup>) which incorporates the argument into the predicate. Thus, in the case of *brusher*, *ironer*, *skater*, *skier*, the "Means-incorporation" transformation adjoins the Instrument to its predicate WITH; in the case of *adviser*, *briber*, *creditor*, the "Object-incorporation" transformation does the same thing to the Object. Later both are subject to Predicate Raising and end up as atomic elements of predicates. This process occurs independently of the nominalization.

The *-er* derivatives display a number of semantic differences. Whereas denominal derivatives are nominalizations of either the Agentive or the Patient role, the deverbal derivatives are nominalizations of such roles as Agentive, Experiencer, Instrumental, Objective, Locative or Goal.

Also, the productivity range of these various nominalization processes is very apparent. The agentive nominalization is by far the most productive.

<sup>3</sup> Discussing the derivation of the sentence: *The proclamation is nailed to the door from a structure like:*



"where 'HOLD' is a three-place predicate relating an instrument, an object to which the instrument is 'applied' and a state in which the instrument maintains the object" McCawley (1971 : 28) mentions a similar transformation which combines the instrument, NAIL, with HOLD, although he does not go into detail about its application. Cf. also Gruber (1967 : 98) who points out that there are "many cases in which the dominated category is incorporated by a word specified for a dominating category. It will be suggested that this is normally possible, and that when it cannot occur, there are special extenuating circumstances".

one. The agentive interpretation of other nominalizations is almost always possible. Lehrer (1969 : 51) points out that though a *toaster* is a THING for toasting, a *roaster* a THING for roasting, "we can easily imagine a situation in which it might be used in an animate sense. For example, a chef might delegate jobs to his assistants, saying *X will be the bread-toaster, Y the mushroom-broiler, and Z the egg-poacher*".

Among the few exceptions are *container, mineralizer, appetizer, atomizer, accelerator, computer, generator, incinerator, fertilizer, refrigerator* (we are not speaking here about the figurative meanings of these words because the process of metaphorical extension should not come under nominalization but under implicational relationships). The predicates involved in their derivation should be marked minus for the agentive transformation.

There is one general restriction as to the formation of Agentive derivatives which is easily predicted within our analysis. Agentives cannot be derived from structures whose case frames do not contain the Agentive case or whose underlying predicate does not contain the semantic prime DO.

Examples: *cost, matter, occur, consist, snow, equal, weigh, collide, resemble, aggrrieve, beware, etc.*<sup>4</sup>

The Experiencer is restricted in a natural way to verbs expressing mental activities. Moreover, some of the verbs do not form derivatives at all, or since the verb is specific to all human beings, the derivative has to be qualified (for further particulars see pp. 67-68). Other types of nominalizations yielding derivatives in *-er* are also restricted by a number of factors. First of all, other roles, except probably for *Object*, occur with a relatively smaller number of predicates. Very often they are optional in the case frame, or as Lakoff observes in the case of the rule responsible for forming Instrumental derivatives, "most verbs that can take instrumentals do not undergo this rule" (1970 : 31). The fact that there is an unlimited number of simple lexical items in English which may easily function as instruments and which block the application of the Instrumental transformation is probably the decisive factor. The same holds true for the remaining types of derived nominals, including *Objects*.

Many derivatives are ambiguous in their meaning. For example, *binder, reaper, collector* may be interpreted either as agentives or instrumentals.

<sup>4</sup> Words like *coster*, "someone costing products", *fogger*, "someone producing fog", *weigher* are possible (as D. Preston pointed out to me), but it is probably the process of recategorization involved here which changes the structure and thus the meaning of the verb. Dowty (1972 : 128-9) foresees such a possibility and suggests that some achievements (*find, spot, identify*) may become accomplishments in certain cases. Thus *finder* and *spotter* may be interpreted as *Agents*, if the action was intentional, or as *Experiencers*, if it happened accidentally.

*Locker, counter, smoker* may be either agentive or locative. *Broiler, roaster, cooker* are chickens or vegetables good for broiling, roasting or cooking, respectively, (i.e., objects), or they may denote instruments used in the respective actions.

As the stem remains unchanged for these different meanings conveyed by the words in question, we are led to the belief that it is the suffix that is responsible for the ambiguity of those derivatives and that in each case a different derivational history is involved. Thus, *binder* or *reaper* are results of either the agentive or instrumental nominalization; *locker* and *counter* are products of either agentive or locative nominalizations. Consequently, we would like to claim that in each of those processes a different separate *-er* suffix is in operation, and that this suffix is a concrete morphophonemic realization of the semantic specifications underlying the role which has undergone the nominalization transformation. An argument in favour of this approach may be the fact that semantically different nominalized forms may occur in the same sentence in English, e.g. *The chopper cut the meat with a chopper* or *The locker put the box into a locker*.

We shall now turn to the nominals of the type *theatre-goer, nutcracker, stamp collector, night worker, etc.* In these compounds the *-er* suffix modifies the second element. The whole may be paraphrased as "one who goes to the theatre (regularly)", "something one cracks nuts with", "one who collects stamps" or "one who works at night". What happens is that contrary to *collector, cracker, worker, etc.*, where other roles in the case-frame are left unspecified, in *stamp collector, night worker, nutcracker*, roles like *Objective, Temporal* or any other are realized by concrete lexical items which are later moved to the front position by the compound-forming transformation. Since \**stamp-collect, book-bind, theatre-go* do not exist in English, we believe that the compounding transformation yielding the above mentioned expressions applies after the nominalization transformation. E.g. in the compound *taxi-driver* first the agentive transformation  $\overline{V-A} \rightarrow V-Af$  operates giving *driver*. This transformation is in turn followed by the T-compounding which yields the form *taxi-driver*. Below we present various types of compounds with the *-er* suffix:

1.  $\overline{V-A-O}$

$\overline{\quad \quad \quad}$

*taxi-driver*

*bone-setter*

*book-binder*

*bird-watcher*

*stockholder*

*stamp-collector*

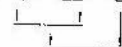
*story-teller*

*gold-digger*

*hairdresser*

*cigar smoker*

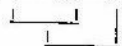
## 2. V-A-G



watch-maker  
shipbuilder  
road-maker  
speechmaker  
letter writer

songwriter  
housebuilder  
peace-maker  
strike-breaker  
dressmaker

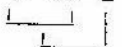
## 3. V-A-L



street-singer  
church-goer  
city slicker  
mountain topper  
schoolteacher

globe-trotter  
mine-worker  
bank-teller  
field-worker

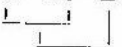
## 4. V-A-I



hand-worker  
fan dancer  
ring swimmer

wormangler  
doghunter

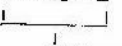
## 5. V-A-T



night singer  
Sunday painter  
day labourer  
night worker

night fighter  
night watcher  
day-dreamer

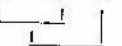
## 6. V-A-I-O



dishwasher  
razor grinder  
nutcracker  
cigarette lighter  
record-player

painkiller  
screwdriver  
tape-recorder  
pen-holder  
hand-mower

## 7. V-E-L



cave-dweller

city-dweller

Expressions like *fast driver*, *graceful dancer*, *good writer*, *heavy smoker*, *high bidder*, *rough rider*, *bad loser*, *newcomer*, *loudspeaker*, *bestseller*, *well-wisher*, *free thinker*, etc., according to Langendoen's suggestion (1970:96) contain in their underlying structures adverbial expressions indicating different roles which in the process of compounding are transformed into adjectives.

If those who claim that lexical entries are arranged into lexical hierarchies<sup>5</sup> and that the process of combining elements has a function of limiting the denotative entropy<sup>6</sup> are right (and we think they are), the element added to the derivative by the compounding transformation restricts or determines the more general meaning of the derivative. *Collector*, for example, can be used with reference to a vast range of people who collect different things; the applicability of *stamp collector* is, however, limited to those who collect stamps<sup>7</sup>.

Expressions of the type *first nighter*, *footballer*, *skyjacker*, *outsider*, *left-hander*, *left-winger*, *pigtailer*, *hitchhiker*, *teenager*, *six-bedder*, etc., form a separate group. In this case the compounding transformation precedes the transformation yielding derivatives and forms stems like *first night*, *football*, *outside*, *hitchhike*, *teenage*, *left wing*, etc., which together with the *-er* suffix added by a later transformation give derivational compounds (cf. Adams 1973:30-89).

A more detailed analysis of the above mentioned expressions is, however, beyond the scope of this paper, as it is rather the process of compounding than derivation that is involved here, which itself is very complex and requires a separate study. We have decided to mention it because for some expressions, e.g. *slow thinker*, *high liver*, *early riser*, *bestseller*, *history knower*, both processes have to occur together. These expressions are felt as syntagmas. The derivative practically does not occur on its own in the generic sense of *one who thinks*, *one who lives*, *one who rises*, *one who knows*, etc., because it has to be qualified either by an adjective or a noun. This means that if the agentive transformation is applied, the compounding transformation has to apply as well.

There is another group of derivatives in *-er* which has to be accounted for,

<sup>5</sup> Bever and Rosenbaum (1970: 13) mark *weapon* as more general than *gun*, which in turn is more general than *firearm* or *pistol*.

<sup>6</sup> Bańczewski, J. — personal communication.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also Marchand (1974: 324): "Semantically speaking, the determinatum represents the element whose range of applicability is limited by the determinant. A *steamboat* is basically a *boat*. But whereas *boat* as an independent unit can be used with reference to an unlimited variety of boats, the applicability of *steamboat* is limited to those which are powered by steam, excluding those which are not steamboats. We might say that this exclusion in *steamboat* of 'non-steamboat' things constitutes the determination of *boat* as performed by the first element *steam*, which has therefore been called the determinant. *Boat*, as the element undergoing a semantic restriction or determination, has been called the determinatum".

i.e., words of the type *out-settler*, *incomer*, *outgoer*, *upclimber*, *bystander*, *over-looker*, *overseer* or *passer-by*, *hanger-on*, *diner-out*, *looker-at*, *maker-up*, *washer-up*, etc.

It seems to us that in these words the atomic predicates OUT, IN, BY, ON, etc. do not undergo predicate raising but lexicalize instead and thus appear on the surface as lexical items. Their arguments, unspecified for their lexical content, are deleted in a way similar to the deletion of arguments in deverbal derivatives.

It should be pointed out here, however, that not all *-er* derivatives lend themselves to a formal analysis. There are several issues which present serious difficulties and cannot be solved within our framework. Moreover, there are also several ambiguities whose nature awaits further research.

First of all, Agentive derivatives display a number of differences which do not show up in the derivation. Words like *killer*, *deserter*, *signer*, *founder* are perfective and momentary, though iterative interpretation is also possible, that is, they refer to persons who have fulfilled the action expressed by the verb once or more times. Words like *writer*, *preacher*, *adviser*, *publisher*, *teacher* refer to persons who perform the actions specified by the verb habitually, often to the degree that it becomes their profession. Words like *reader*, *fighter*, *screamer*, *walker* not only express performers of some habitual action but they may also denote people having some inclination to the action specified by the verb. In many cases, as is pointed out by Wierzbicka (1969), the agentive nominalization expresses an actual doer (simultaneous with the point of reference). In *I saw this skater before*, the word *skater* is interpreted as 'he who is skating at the moment', and the whole action is coreferential with the moment of the utterance.

Because in all these instances the suffix remains the same, we are induced to believe that the semantic differences within one type of derivatives are due to the semantic properties of their verbal stems, such as duration, completion, iterativity, inceptivity, etc. Although the semantic feature DO is basically responsible for the agentive nominalization, yet other features can sometimes be reflected in the derivative. Any further analysis of this problem should be preceded by a thorough investigation of the combinations of semantic material of predicates.

For many verbs OED lists two derivatives: *claimer*: *claimant*, *attender*: *attendant*, *commenter*: *commentator*, *harper*: *harpist*, *flirter*: *flirt*, *sponger*: *sponge*, *resider*: *resident*, *drinker*: *drunkard*, with roughly the same meaning, but with the second form marked as more commonly used nowadays. In some of these pairs, however, there is a semantic difference between the two forms: *informant*, *discussant* are used in purely agentive meanings, while *informer*, *discusser* have pejorative connotations.

This factor, as well as the fact that constructions with *-ing* may take over the agentive meaning of the *-er* suffix, viz.

*all waiters* — *all those waiting*  
*all parkers* — *all those parking*  
*he is an annoyer* — *he is an annoying man*

has led Pervaz (1969:484-5) to the conclusion that the *-er* formation is becoming increasingly rare for human agents and is being replaced by other endings.

Although these phenomena may be observed in English, it seems to us that her claim is too strong and that the process of forming agentive derivatives with the *-er* suffix is still highly productive.

Derivatives formed from verbs expressing mental processes or states like *thinker*, *imaginer*, *liker*, sensorial processes like *seer*, *feeler* or certain processes generally typical of human or animate beings, display a number of interesting properties. Many of them are marked in the dictionaries as possible but rare, e. g. *liker*, *intender*, *rememberer*, *knower*, *dier*. Some of them are used either in a different meaning or have to be modified by an adjective or another noun.

- a. The noun *thinker*, for example, has to be modified in its general meaning "one who thinks" by a qualifying adjective, and *slow thinker* or *great thinker* come from a structure "one who thinks in a way expressed by an adjective". Otherwise, there is a change of meaning: "one who has a special or well-trained power of thought", "one who devotes himself to thinking, as distinct from action or practical affairs" (OED).
- b. The noun *seer* is marked in OED as rare in its general meaning "one who sees" and is used in a specialized meaning "one who has a power of second thought" synonymous with *clairvoyant*, *prophet* or *magician*.
- c. The nouns *breather* and *liver* have to be qualified by an adjective and do not come from the underlying structure "one who breathes" or "one who is alive", but rather from "one who breathes or lives in a special way".

*He is a heavy breather* < *He breathes heavily*.

*He is a high liver* < *He lives a life of pleasure*.

- d. Verbs like *eat*, *drink*, *sleep* do not form derivatives in their general meaning "one who eats, drinks or sleeps", as these activities are characteristic of all animate beings. The derivatives formed from them are either modified by an adjective which has the same function as in a, b and c (examples: *slow eater*, *heavy drinker*, *fast sleeper*) or they express an inclination to the action expressed by the verb. If the verb is followed by an object, the inclination is more specific, i. e., *beer drinker*, *beef eater*, etc. The underlying structure is something like "one who likes to eat, sleep, drink to excess".



- e. The noun *sayer* occurs only in compounds like *soothsayer*, *false-sayer*, *ney-sayer* and is derived from a structure like "one who says something specified".

Many derivatives are ambiguous between the habitual and actual meanings, e.g.:

- swimmer*: 1. a person who swims habitually  
2. a person swimming at a given moment
- dancer*: 1. he who dances habitually, professionally  
2. a person dancing at a given moment
- speaker*: 1. a person who gives speeches  
2. a person who is speaking at the moment

However, when they are used in the actual, not habitual sense, they cannot occur in the predicate position, since this position is reserved for general events (Wierzbicka 1969:167 - 176).

Finally, a few of the derived words display an ambiguity between transitive and intransitive senses, e. g.:

- demonstrator*: 1. one who demonstrates against sth.  
2. one who demonstrates sth.
- striker*: 1. one who is on strike  
2. one who has a tendency to attack others
- trier*: 1. one who tries hard  
2. one who is employed to try things
- mixer*: 1. one who mixes things  
2. one who associates with others in company

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