From *old-English grubbers* to *cheeky blighters*?

Variation in the productivity of *-er* in the history of English

Tanja Säily, Jukka Suomela & Eetu Mäkelä
We are interested in...

• The **historical sociolinguistics** of derivation and neologisms
  – Who are the innovators and why?

• **Syntheticity** in morphology
  – Hypothesis: cline between derivation and inflection, both contribute to syntheticity
  – Evidence for cline: similar variation & change
Nominal suffixes -er and -or

• Typically derive agentive or instrumental nouns from verbs: *driver, governor, filler*
  – Also: person ‘concerned with N’ / ‘living in N’
  – Here: division into animate vs. inanimate

• -or: Latinate variant of -er
  – Pronounced identically (*adviser/advisor*)
    → treated as a single suffix here
    (Plag 2003: 89; Bauer 2001: 199–203)
Productivity of -er and -or

• **Sociolinguistic variation?**
  – “Default” suffix (Bauer et al. 2013: 232) \(\rightarrow \) no?
  – Säily (2011): women use -ity less productively than men; lower-class women: also -ness
    • Gendered styles?

• **Productivity \(\approx\) type frequency**
  – Number of different words containing the suffix
  – Baayen (2009), Säily & Suomela (2009)
Material

- **BNC = British National Corpus**, early 1990s
  - Demographically sampled spoken component, both gender & social class known:
    358 speakers, 2.6 Mw

- **CEEC = Corpora of Early English Correspondence**, C18 section (1680–1800)
  - Speech-like genre, social metadata
  - 315 writers, 2.2 Mw
Methods

• Types cross-checked with MorphoQuantics (Laws & Ryder 2014a, b)

• CEEC: FiCa interface for classifying data (developed by Eetu Mäkelä)

• Analysis of productivity: types2 (Suomela 2015, 2016)
# MorphiQuantics

-er³ (Forms Ns from Adj, Vs & Ns); Language of Origin = Germanic / Latin; Etymology = -árjoz / -árían; Meaning = an entity that performs the action specified by the verb; Type = Suffix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headword</th>
<th>PoS</th>
<th>Confirmed PoS</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Summed</th>
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of small diameter which the seed is to be subjected to before it is exposed to the pressure of the great stone

This he says is a late invention; but as it requires more workmanship than is easy to be had here I think cast iron roll
er is cheaper than wood. In many places I imagine the rollers of stone may be cheaper; but that would not be the case here. Gapper is returned and his having seen you all has attached me to him. It is probable we may be concerned together in the erection of an oil mill which gave rise to the above question. In a model he has brought with him from England there is an apparatus for bruising the seed by making it pass between two iron rollers of small diameter which the seed is to be subjected to before it is exposed to the pressure of the great stone.
The corpus `bnc-spoken-demo` contains 358 samples and 2,632,512 running words.

The dataset `er+or thing` contains 111 hapaxes, 3,318 types, and 320 tokens.

The collection `Female` contains 1,582,116 running words and 218 types.

Only **0.0016%** of random collections with 1,582,116 running words contain at most 218 types.

This finding is probably interesting: the false discovery rate is **0.0063**.
Case 1: BNC

- Men use -er more productively than women
  - Focus on tools & occupations, playful name-calling: masculine identity-building?
- Especially older men, even at home
  - cf. Keune et al. (2006, 2012); Štekauer et al. (2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sample</th>
<th>description</th>
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<th>word</th>
<th>after</th>
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<td>blighter</td>
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<td>C1 m 35-44 draughtsman</td>
<td>Cheeky</td>
<td>blighter</td>
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<td>AB m 45-59 charge nurse</td>
<td>Well these poor</td>
<td>blighters</td>
<td>who go</td>
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<td>PS4YX</td>
<td>AB m -14 student</td>
<td>had a history with his toe poor</td>
<td>blighter</td>
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</table>
Case 2: CEEC

Corpora of Early English Correspondence,
1680–1800
The corpus **CEEC** contains 579 samples and 2,216,119 running words.

The dataset **er+or person** contains 218 hapaxes, 573 types, and 7,921 tokens.

The collection **1680-1719** contains 2,567 tokens and 304 types.

Only **0.22%** of random collections with 2,567 tokens contain at most 304 types.

This finding is probably interesting: the false discovery rate is **0.044**.
The corpus **CEEC** contains 579 samples and 2,216,119 running words.

The dataset **er+or** contains 250 hapaxes, 639 types, and 8,162 tokens.

The collection **Male TC** contains 507,958 running words and 364 types.

Only 0.088% of random collections with 507,958 running words contain at least 364 types.

This finding is probably interesting: the false discovery rate is 0.025.
Change and variation observed

• Productivity of -er increases over time
  – Stylistic change or continued semantic expansion? (Säily 2014, -ity; Dalton-Puffer 1994)
  – Inanimate -er very infrequent compared to BNC
    • Later technological developments?

• Men writing to their close friends overuse -er
  – Less stable relationship a trigger for productivity? (cf. Wolfson 1990; Säily 2014, -ity)

• Who are the overusers?
Most productive early users

• **Robert Southwell**, diplomat (1635–1702)
  And consequently the State will be owners and disposers of the Children begotten ...
  (to William Petty, 1685; PETTY2_010)

• **John Evelyn**, writer & translator (1620–1706)
  I make this Reflection on the Reflecter, that: he is now and then mistaken in his Politics ...
  (to Samuel Pepys, 1687; EVELYN2_008)
Most productive male user (TC)

• **Ignatius Sancho**, author (1729?–1780)
  – 46 types, 58 tokens

Poor blundering M, I pity thee – Once more I tell thee, thou art a **bungler** in every thing – ask the girls else. – You know nothing of figures – you write a wretched hand – thou hast a non-sensical style – almost as disagreeable as thy heart ...

  (to John Meheux, 1779; SANCHO_033)
What about neologisms?

• End of C18: -er highly productive – what kinds of neologisms by whom?
  – Säily (forthcoming), -ity: words describing people, created by male professionals

• Working definition of neologism: corpus attestation max 100 years after OED first attestation date (cf. Säily forthcoming)
25 neologisms found, 1760–1800

- **Describing people:** absconder, *blubberer* (1782<1786), *commemorator* (1784<1856), completer, complimenter, dangler, *outsider* (1800=OED), schemer, seceder, *spiter* (1790<1847), swindler
  - **Occupations:** (shirt-)airer, gambler, hairdresser, (China-)piece, smuggler
- **Connected to places:** Chiswicker, Madrasser, Norfolker, Turnham-Greener (none in OED)
- **Things:** cutter ‘boat’, ventilator
- **Other:** brightener, *plumper* ‘lie’ (1776=OED), *winterer* (1784<1795)
Who are the innovators?

• **Thomas Twining**, clergymen, classical scholar (c.1734–1804)

• **Hester Piozzi**, writer (1741–1821)
  – *seceder, spiter* 1790

• **Jane Austen**, novelist (1775–1817)
  – *outsider* 1800

• **George Culley**, agriculturist (c.1735–1813)
  – *Norfolker, winterer* 1784
How do they use the neologisms?

As to myself, *Cecilia* has done just what she pleas’d with me: I laughed, & cried (for I am one of the *blubberers*) when she bade me.

(Thomas Twining to Charles Burney, 1782; TWINING_033)

it makes me laugh when I think how the *Spiters* told us that *Siddons had lost all her Popularity* ...

(Hester Piozzi to Charlotte Lewis, 1790; PIOZZI_027)
CEEC: Summary of results

• **Most productive users** (type frequency): men writing to close friends
  – e.g. Ignatius Sancho, author

• **Innovators**: men and women, mostly in their 40s–50s, professional / other non-gentry, writing to close friends or family

• Often **words describing people**, designed to amuse the recipient – linked to writing style
  – Playful abuse an element here as well (cf. BNC)
Conclusion

• Variation in the productivity of -er
  – Similar results obtained in 18th-century and Present-day English: masculine identity-building?

• Neologisms: goal to expand to the entire CEEC

• Similar variation and change observed within the productivity of both derivational and inflectional suffixes
  – -ity, -ness (Säily 2014), -er (this study), comparative -er (Säily et al. forthcoming)
  – Supports the hypothesis of a cline (see also Bauer 2004, Gaeta 2007) → derivation contributes to syntheticity alongside inflection (cf. Danchev 1992)
References

• CEEC = *Corpora of Early English Correspondence*. Compiled by T. Nevalainen, H. Raumolin-Brunberg et al. at the University of Helsinki. [http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/CoRD/corpora/CEEC/](http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/CoRD/corpora/CEEC/)
References


References