

## THE VERBALIZATION OF INSTRUMENTALS IN ENGLISH

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1.0. There are at least three common and productive ways of deriving new verbs in English: (1) by transforming Verb+Instrumental Preposition+Noun into a verb derived from the noun object of the preposition, (2) by transforming Verb+Locative Preposition+Noun into a verb derived from the noun object of the preposition, or (3) by transforming Verb+LIKE+Noun into a verb derived from the noun after LIKE, i.e., a simile is transformed into a metaphor. Examples of these three types are as follows:

1a *he covered his face with lather*

1b *he lathered his face*

2a *he got his opponent into a corner*

2b *he cornered his opponent*

3a *he ate his food like a wolf*

3b *he wolfed his food*

In this article only the instrumental type (cf., 1a, 1b) will be discussed. The other two types were revealed while the corpus was being compiled.

1.1. A common way of deriving new verbs in English is to transform V+PI+N into VI, where

V=Main Verb

PI=Instrumental Preposition

N=Noun (Object of PI)

VI=Verbalized Instrumental

For example:

*John pounded the nail with a hammer* ⇒

N<sub>1</sub> V N<sub>2</sub> PI N<sub>3</sub>

*John hammered the nail*

N<sub>1</sub> VI N<sub>2</sub>

The object of the preposition is transformed into the main verb and replaces it, and the prepositional phrase is lost. The repetition of the prepositional phrase would be redundant if VI is derived from  $N_3$ , cf.,

*John hammered the nail with a hammer*

However, if VI is not derived from  $N_3$ , then a new sentence

*John hammered the nail with a stone*

is possible, although a new sentence \**John stoned the nail* is not possible.

The following article will show in which semantic categories this type of transformation tends to be productive; however, it must be remembered that this type of construction is not necessarily automatic.

1.2. Morphophonemics and Derivation. Verbs derived from instrumentals undergo sporadic morphophonemic alternations. The only regular and consistent alternation is that of final  $-\theta$  to  $-\delta$ , e.g.,

Noun	verb
mouth	> mouth /maw θ/ > /maw δ/
bath	> bathe /American only/

The vowel alternation in *bath/bathe* does not belong to a regular pattern of such alternations. Except for the alternation cited above /θ > δ/ the form of the derived verb is identical to the noun from which it is derived.

1.2.1. Back formations are also possible. For example, nouns ending in *-er* which look formally like a noun of agent lose the *-er* element when the new verb is derived.

Verb	Noun
bulldoze	< bulldozer
Also: house	< housing
televise	< television

1.2.2. In compound nouns one of the elements may be lost when the new verb is derived, cf.,

Verb	Noun
sand	< sandpaper
vacuum	< vacuum cleaner

1.2.3. If the verbal element of a phrasal verb is being replaced by a noun, only the verb is lost; the phrasal particle remains, cf.,

shoot down with a gun	> gun down
tie up with a string	> string up
close up with bricks	> brick up

1.3. Morphology. All verbs derived in this way are regular even though they may be homonymous with irregular verbs.

*he ringed the bull = he provided the bull's nose with a ring*

The two exceptions to the rule that all such verbs are regular are the verbs *light* and *shoe (a horse)*. In both British and American English the verb *light* may be regular or irregular:

light	lighted	lighted
light	lit	lit

as in:

*he lighted her cigarette*  
or: *he lit her cigarette*

The principal parts of *shoe* are: shoe shod shod

1.4. The Semantic Categories. The corpus of approximately two hundred items that we gathered — mainly by thinking them up rather than by searching through dictionaries or texts — revealed that there are numerous semantic areas where the verbalization of instrumentals can take place. Below is given a preliminary list — preliminary because the list can be expanded considerably and because the number of semantic categories might be combined thus reducing the number.

#### 1.4.1. Verbs of ASSAULTING, ATTACKING, HITTING.

4a *he attacked the enemy with a club*

4b *he clubbed the enemy*

5a *they attacked the enemy position with rockets*

5b *they rocketed the enemy position*

6a *he hit the guy in the groin with his knee*

6b *he kneed the guy in the groin*

7a *the doctor opened the boil with a lance*

7b *the doctor lanced the boil*

A. Other nouns which act the same way: *bayonet, bomb, machine gun, grenade, shell, spear, elbow, knife, gun down, bazooka, ram* (from *battering ram*), *cane, stone, hammer, saw, cudgel, bat, whip, switch*.

B. Words in the same category that do not act the same way: *rifle* (except in the meaning of search through, e.g. a drawer), *tank, fist, foot, sword, dagger, lance* (the large variety), *bow, arrow, bullet*.

At least two reasons may be found for certain items not fitting the general transformational rule: (1) with a word like *bullet* the semantic emphasis is placed on the instrument used for launching the bullet, i.e. the gun, since



bullets are fired only from guns. Rockets, however, may be launched from airplanes or rocket launchers of various sorts so that the emphasis is only the type of shelling used, and (2) words which already have a verb closely associated with them seem to resist the verbal transformation, cf.,

fist — hit, punch	sword, dagger — stab
foot — kick	arrow — shoot

#### 1.4.2. Verbs of ATTACHING, SECURING.

8a *he attached the papers together with a staple*

8b *he stapled the papers together*

9a *he attached the boards together with a nail*

9b *he nailed the boards together*

10a *he is putting on the stamp with glue*

10b *he is gluing on the stamp*

- A. Other nouns which act the same way: *pin, tack, thumbtack, screw* (from *screwdriver*), *tape* (*scotch tape, cellotape*), *gum, paste, rivet, stitch, wire, chain, band, rope, cement, bridge, lock, bolt, hinge*.

#### 1.4.3. Verbs of CLEANING AND TIDYING.

11a *she cleans the floor with a Hoover*

11b *she hoovers the floor*

12a *she cleans the tub with Ajax*

12b *she ajaxes the tub*

13a *he ventilated the room with air*

13b *he aired the room*

Note that in this group there are several verbs derived from trademarks.

- A. Other nouns which act the same way: *shampoo, vacuum* (from *vacuum cleaner*), *Brillo, brush, comb, filter*.

- B. But not: *broom*, most likely because the noun *broom* is closely associated with the verb *sweep*.

1.4.4. Verbs of PROVIDING. This category "to provide something with something" seems to be the largest group of those verbs which can make the instrumental transformation.

14a *she provided the needle with thread*

14b *she threaded the needle*

15a *he provided the screw with threads*

15b *he threaded the screw*

16a *the men were provided with housing in barracks*

16b *the men were housed in barracks*

17a *he provided the soup with salt*

17b *he salted the soup*

- A. Other nouns which act the same way: *wine* (in the expression *wine and dine*), *stamp, address, seal, putty, heel* (a shoe), *toe* (a shoe), *water* (horse, garden), *mark, check, star, line, arm* (military), *stock, cover, collar* (a horse), *shoe* (a horse), *gas up* (a car), *oil* (a machine), *grease* (a car), *camouflage, bug* (provide with bugs = listening devices), *pepper, spice, sugar* (tea), *ring* (a bull), *letter*.

1.4.5. Verbs of ENCLOSING. These verbs are closely related to the verbs of PROVIDING, however, the result is always enclosure, confinement or restraint.

18a *they enclosed the beer with bottles*

18b *they bottled the beer*

19a *he caught the fish with a net*

19b *he netted the fish*

20a *the cowboy caught the steer with a lasso*

20b *the cowboy lassoed the steer*

- A. Other nouns which act the same way include: *can* (Amer.), *tin* (Brit.), *box, barrel, case, carton, trap, snare, harpoon, hook, spear, rope, leash, jail, band, seal, sack, bag, crate, fence in, corral, hedge* (avoid confrontation), *wall up, brick up, board up, plug up, dam up*.

1.4.6. Verbs of COVERING. These verbs are also closely related to the verbs of PROVIDING, but in such cases the entire surface of an object is covered with some substance.

21a *he covered his back with soap*

21b *he soaped his back*

22a *he covered the wall with paint*

22b *he painted the wall*

23a *she covered the bread with butter*

23b *she buttered the bread*

- A. Other nouns which act the same way: *lather, paper, wallpaper, lacquer, varnish, grease, oil, tar and feather, plaster, stucco, tar, asphalt, surface, wax, carpet, panel* (a wall), *tile, whitewash, dust* (for fingerprints— not remove dust!), *color, dye, powder* (face).



1.4.7. Verbs of CONTACTING. A few nouns denoting means of communication can be transformed into verbs.

24a *he contacted his mother by cable*

24b *he cabled his mother*

25a *the captain contacted the ship by radio*

25b *the captain radioed the ship*

26a *he contacted his aunt by telephone*

26b *he telephoned his aunt*

A. Other nouns which act the same way: *phone, wire, S. O. S., telex.*

B. But not: *letter, telegram, satellite, E. S. P.*

1.4.8. Verbs of RECORDING. A very few verbs may be formed from nouns to indicate the recording of an object or event. The recording may be internal (in the mind, memory) or external (on tape, on records, etc.).

27a *he recorded the music by means of tape*

27b *he taped the music*

28a *he recorded her (image) on a photograph*

28b *he photographed her*

29a *he recorded her (image) by means of paint*

29b *he painted her*

A. Other nouns which act the same way: *eye, nose, nose around, film, xerox, microfilm, type (from typewriter), televise.*

1.4.9. Verbs of TRANSFORMING. Within this class of derived verbs the meaning implied is that as a result of the action a thing is changed so that it cannot be restored to its original condition. One might argue that such verbs should be included together with the verbs of ATTACKING, etc., in 1.4.

30a *he transformed the board with a plane*

30b *he planed the board*

31a *they leveled the ground with a bulldozer*

31b *they bulldozed the ground*

32a *he prepared the floor with sandpaper*

32b *he sanded (sandpapered) the floor*

A. Other nouns which act the same way: *plow, hoe, rake, harrow, combine, tool (leather), chisel, axe, saw, drill.*

1.4.10. The final category of instrumentals which can be verbalized are those nouns of TRANSPORTING and TRANSFERRING. This is the only class of nouns which produces intransitive verbs as well as transitive. The reader may have already noticed that all of the verbs generated so far are transitive. When modes of transportation are referred to and the main verb replaced is *go*, an intransitive verb will result.

33a *they went to the city by (motor) car*

33b *they motored to the city*

34a *he went to school by bicycle*

34b *he bicycled (cycled) to school*

35a *they went to Paris by jet (plane)*

35b *they jetted to Paris*

Most of the nouns denoting means of transportation do not undergo this transformation, perhaps because the verbs *go, ride* or *travel* are closely associated with them, cf., *car, auto, plane, train, coach, horse, rocket, streetcar, tram, buggy, motorcycle, motorbike, scooter.*

Transitive verbs of this class include:

36a *they take children to school by bus*

36b *they bus children to school*

37a *they took the eggs to market by cart*

37b *they carted the eggs to market*

38a *he transferred the book to me by hand*

38b *he handed me the book*

39a *they put the hay onto the wagon with a pitchfork*

39b *they forked the hay onto the wagon*

A. Other nouns which act the same way: *spoon, switch (a train), hoist, shovel rake (leaves).*

Note that the intransitive verbs *ski, skate, iceskate, sled* should probably be categorized together with the locative types mentioned in 1.0. and not with the instrumentals discussed here, cf., *go on skis, go on skates, go on a sled*, though it could be argued that they mean *go by means of skis*, etc.

1.5. Conclusion. In TG terms there seems to be a transformation which deletes certain adverbial and prepositional phrases and places the nominal in these phrases in the verb position. In such cases we can posit a deep verbal which is deleted in the deep structure and replaced with the lexical item which might otherwise be attached to the NP position in the adverbial or prepositional phrase.

For instrumental prepositional phrases there seem to be several (ten were counted here) semantic categories of deep verb which may be replaced. It has been noted that not all nouns may be automatically transformed into a verb in a given category; but, on the other hand, such constructions do not disturb a native speaker of either British or American English even if he has never heard or produced a given expression. This type of construction is productive especially when the deep verb is PROVIDE or one of those closely related to it (COVER or ENCLOSE). The reasons for an English speaker's readiness to make such transformations is probably threefold: (1) a tendency to produce the shortest and most concise utterances to give the greatest amount of information, (2) the fact that English has very little morphological baggage so that it is very easy to take any lexical item and use it as a noun, verb or even adjective, and (3) the fact that ambiguity virtually never arises. Of course, a sentence such as

40a *she bottled the wine*

could mean:

40b *she attacked the wine with a bottle*

as in: *she clubbed her husband*

or: 40c *she covered the wine with bottles*

as in: *she soaped her back*

or: 40d *she contacted the wine with a bottle*

as in: *she wired her mother-in-law*

or: 40e *she recorded the wine with a bottle*

as in: *she filmed her husband's French lesson*

and so on. However, there is usually no problem in interpretation, and a language easily supports the ambiguities that do exist without too much confusion given the proper context—even with a sentence like: *Da Vinci painted the chair*. In the verbs derived in this short presentation ambiguity is resolved primarily because every speaker of English is fully aware of the use and limitations placed on the instruments under discussion.

A further study should be made to (1) attempt to reduce the number of deep verb semantic categories in the instrumental constructions, (2) examine those locative and metaphorical constructions which also involve the transformation of nouns into verbs, and (3) examine the possibility of whether perhaps not *all* verbs are in fact derived from nouns in a similar way in the deep structure.